

Exercise slows age-related cognitive decline

If you find multi-tasking a breeze or if doing two things at once seems like a “no-brainer,” you might be fit. At least that’s what recent studies say.

Research shown in the *Frontiers in Aging and Neuroscience* journal found a link between good cardio health and better cognitive function. The study correlates older adult’s higher fitness levels with their ability to multi-task.

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Scientists say we can improve the brain’s area that’s used to manage time, planning, organizing and recalling details. It just takes improving our cardio respiratory fitness level — also known as speed walking or jaunts on the treadmill.

But if you don’t like to jog in place or speed walk through the neighborhood, there are other ways to improve the bodies circulatory and respiratory system as it burns the fuel and oxygen supplies during sustained physical activity

Revvng up our cardiorespiratory fitness takes the ability of both systems (heart and lungs) to tolerate the kinds of prolonged exercise and activity that taps those organs.

You can engage your cardiorespiratory system by swimming, bicycling or any activity that gets your heart rate up by generally using the larger muscle groups. As the large muscles perform, your breathing increases, your heart rate climbs, and your lungs call for more oxygen.

If we perform the activities on a regu-



lar basis we develop improved endurance. Cardiorespiratory endurance, as defined by the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, is the body’s ability to deliver oxygen and other nutrients to tissue and to remove waste products over a sustained period of time.

That means if you’re huffing and puffing less after many sustained workouts, you’ve harnessed these systems for better performance.

By improving our performance, we

can offset the age-related decline in our cardiovascular and cardiorespiratory systems that will lead to our brain’s functional decline.

As we age, our memories and other brain functions decline. In particular, we begin to lose the white matter, the “superhighways” of the brain that help carry information between different regions. Each year, from our 20s on, we lose 1 percent of brain volume in the hippocampus, whose major function in the brain is related to memory and cer-

tain types of learning.

Research proves exercise improves blood flow to the brain and helps revitalize some of the aging brain’s functions even more than the act of thinking.

Many people question, “Why would exercise build brain power in ways that thinking might not?” Experts say that the brain is a tissue, like all muscles and organs. Sitting and pondering about exercise does nothing for cardiorespiratory fitness and generates little blood flow to the brain.

But research proves exercise increases blood flow to the brain and helps revitalize some of the aging brain’s functions to help detour many of the expected declines of mental activity with exercise.

For those who are trying to improve the aging process, there are options that offer a non-pharmaceutical approach. It’s beginning to look like exercise will be the new wonder drug.

Using exercise as medicine may be just what the doctor orders next. To ensure that you’re getting the best exercise regimen, contact your physician. His or her advice may refer you to begin working with a physical therapist who can show you the types of senior-safe exercises that can enhance your cognitive abilities. ■

— For more information regarding cardiorespiratory rehabilitation, call Port Charlotte Rehabilitation Center at 235-8011. It offers comprehensive rehabilitative outpatient and inpatient services for short- or long-term care and is located at 25325 Rampart Blvd., Port Charlotte.

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