

Brain fitness programs may help frail elderly walk faster

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Computerized brain fitness programs are known to help seniors improve their memory and focus. Now, a study led by researchers at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University has found preliminary evidence that such programs may help frail seniors walk faster, potentially preventing disability and improving quality of life. Results appear in the July 19 online edition of the *Journal of Gerontology*.

The researchers recruited 20 frail seniors (aged 70 or older) who were sedentary (exercised once a week or less) and walked slowly (a speed of one meter per second or less). Ten of the seniors (the intervention group) participated in the Mindfit brain fitness program three times weekly for eight weeks, with each training session lasting from 45 to 60 minutes. During the sessions, they carried out tasks aimed at sharpening [cognitive abilities](#) such as focusing, planning, organizing and problem solving. The other 10 seniors constituted the control group.

Compared with their speeds at the start of the study, the 10 seniors in the intervention group improved their normal-walking velocity, although the gain was not statistically significant. For walking while talking - which requires considerably more concentration than normal walking - the seniors who took computer training notably improved compared with their initial speeds. By contrast, no improvement in walking speed was observed for the control group.

"This was a small study - we're now preparing to do a larger clinical trial

- but the results suggest that brain fitness programs show promise for helping the frail elderly walk better," says lead author Joe Verghese, M.D., professor in the Saul R. Korey Department of Neurology and the Murray D. Gross Memorial Faculty Scholar in Gerontology at Einstein.

The findings, if duplicated in a larger study, could have important implications since the frail elderly are often in poor health and unable to participate in exercises that build strength and improve balance. Intervening through [brain fitness](#) programs could provide a useful alternative.

Provided by Albert Einstein College of Medicine

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