

Walk much? It may protect your memory down the road

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New research suggests that walking at least six miles per week may protect brain size and in turn, preserve memory in old age, according to a study published in the October 13, 2010, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

"Brain size shrinks in late adulthood, which can cause memory problems. Our results should encourage well-designed trials of physical exercise in older adults as a promising approach for preventing dementia and Alzheimer's disease," said study author Kirk I. Erickson, PhD, with the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh.

For the study, 299 dementia-free people recorded the number of blocks they walked in one week. Then nine years later, scientists took [brain scans](#) of the participants to measure their brain size. After four more years, the participants were tested to see if they had developed [cognitive impairment](#) or dementia.

The study found that people who walked at least 72 blocks per week, or roughly six to nine miles, had greater [gray matter](#) volume than people who didn't walk as much, when measured at the nine-year time point after their recorded activity. Walking more than 72 blocks did not appear to increase gray matter volume any further.

By four years later, 116 of the participants, or 40 percent, had developed cognitive impairment or [dementia](#). The researchers found that those who walked the most cut their risk of developing [memory problems](#) in half.

"If regular exercise in midlife could improve brain health and improve thinking and memory in later life, it would be one more reason to make regular exercise in people of all ages a public health imperative," said Erickson.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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