

To reap the brain benefits of physical activity, just get moving

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

Everyone knows that exercise makes you feel more mentally alert at any age. But do you need to follow a specific training program to improve your cognitive function? Science has shown that the important thing is to just get moving. It's that simple. In fact, this was the finding of a study conducted at the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal (IUGM), an institution affiliated with Université de Montréal, by Dr. Nicolas

Berryman, PhD, Exercise Physiologist, under the supervision of Dr. Louis Bherer, PhD, and Dr. Laurent Bosquet, PhD, that was published in the journal *Age* (American Aging Association) in October.

The study compared the effects of different training methods on the cognitive functions of people aged 62 to 84 years. Two groups were assigned a high-intensity aerobic and strength-training program, whereas the third group performed tasks that targeted gross motor activities (coordination, balance, ball games, locomotive tasks, and flexibility). While the aerobics and strength-training were the only exercises that led to physical fitness improvements after 10 weeks (in terms of body composition, VO2 max, and maximum strength), all three groups showed equivalent improvement in [cognitive performance](#).

The subjects in the third group performed activities that can easily be done at home, which is excellent news for sedentary people who can't see themselves suddenly going to a gym to work out. To improve your [cognitive health](#), you can simply start by doing any activity you like.

"Our study targeted executive functions, or the functions that allow us to continue reacting effectively to a changing environment. We use these functions to plan, organize, develop strategies, pay attention to and remember details, and manage time and space," explained Dr. Louis Bherer, PhD.

"For a long time, it was believed that only [aerobic exercise](#) could improve executive functions. More recently, science has shown that strength-training also leads to positive results. Our new findings suggest that structured activities that aim to improve [gross motor skills](#) can also improve executive functions, which decline as we age. I would like seniors to remember that they have the power to improve their physical and cognitive health at any age and that they have many avenues to reach this goal," concluded Dr. Nicolas Berryman, PhD.

More information: Multiple roads lead to Rome: combined high-intensity aerobic and strength training vs. gross motor activities leads to equivalent improvement in executive functions in a cohort of healthy older adults, *Age* (Dordrecht, Netherlands) 10/2014; 36(5):9710. [DOI: 10.1007/s11357-014-9710-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11357-014-9710-8)

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