

Exercise might boost mental function in people with schizophrenia

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Aerobic activity offers many benefits, but study needs to be duplicated, researcher says.

(HealthDay)—Aerobic exercise might boost memory and thinking skills in people with schizophrenia, a small study finds.

The research included 33 schizophrenia patients who were randomly assigned to receive one of two treatments. One group was given standard psychiatric treatment (the control group). The other took part in a 12-week aerobic exercise program using active-play video games and standard exercise equipment. The patients in the [exercise group](#) also continued to receive standard psychiatric care.

By the end of the study period, aerobic fitness improved by 18 percent in the exercise group. It fell by 0.5 percent in the control group. Mental

(cognitive) function improved by 15 percent in the exercise group. Mental functioning fell by 2 percent in the [control group](#), according to the study.

The study was published online March 24 in the journal *Schizophrenia Bulletin*.

"Our results indicate that poor [aerobic fitness](#) represents a modifiable risk factor for cognitive dysfunction in people with schizophrenia for which aerobic exercise training offers a safe, non-stigmatizing and side-effect-free intervention," said lead author David Kimhy in a journal news release. He is an assistant professor in psychiatry and director of the Experimental Psychopathology Lab at the New York State Psychiatric Institute in New York City.

The researchers said a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor—which increases with physical activity—may be "a potential mechanism" for the exercise-related improvements in [schizophrenia patients' mental function](#).

"If replicated, our findings may lead to the integration of aerobic exercise into standard psychiatric treatment for people with schizophrenia and other severe mental health problems, Kimhy said.

The study only found an association between exercise and mental function. Kimhy noted, however, that along with the well-documented benefits of exercise, such as better heart health and help with weight management, [aerobic exercise](#) appears to offer the potential to improve mental function in people with schizophrenia.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more about [schizophrenia](#).

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