

# Research shows that sexual activity and emotional closeness are unrelated to the rate of cognitive decline

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Older people who enjoy a sexually active and emotionally close relationship with their partner tend to perform better at memory tests than sexually inactive older adults on a short-term basis, but this is not the case over a longer period of time. This is according to a study using data from more than 6000 adults aged 50 and over. The research by

Mark Allen of the University of Wollongong in Australia is published in Springer's journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

Age-related cognitive decline varies considerably and can range from mild to severe—in the case of people living with dementia. Lifestyle factors, such as someone's level of education, smoking and drinking habits, and level of physical activity have all been found to play a role in the rate and extent of age-related cognitive decline. This study now shows that there is no link between [sexual activity](#) and rate of cognitive decline.

Allen investigated whether ongoing sexual activity and the experience of emotional closeness with a partner has any effect on [memory](#). He analyzed and compared data from 2012 and 2014 contained in the English Longitudinal Study of Aging (ELSA), which includes information about the health, diet, well-being and socio-economic status of adults older than 50 living in England. Participants in the ELSA completed an episodic memory task and a questionnaire where they reported the frequency of intimate activities such as kissing, sexual touching and intercourse.

Allen found an overall decline in all participants' score on the memory test over time.

"Decline in memory performance over time was unrelated to sexual activity or [emotional closeness](#) during partnered sexual activity" says Allen.

He notes how the current study builds on previous experimental work conducted on non-human animals. Past research had established that sexual activity enhances rodents' ability to recognise objects and therefore ultimately their episodic memory workings and overall brain health. It stimulated the growth of neurons in the hippocampus, a part of

the brain that is activated when episodic and spatial memory tasks are performed.

**More information:** Mark S. Allen, Sexual Activity and Cognitive Decline in Older Adults, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-018-1193-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1193-8)

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