

Researchers identify factors linked with healthy memory in older adults

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“It may be possible to use these factors to improve outcomes for older adults,” said U of A researcher Peggy McFall, the study’s lead author. Credit: Cooper & O’Hara Photography

In a new study that has implications for preventing Alzheimer's disease through targeted early intervention efforts, University of Alberta neuroscientists have identified different factors for maintaining healthy memory and avoiding memory decline for people 55 and over.

"It may be possible to use these factors to improve outcomes for [older adults](#)," said the study's lead author, Peggy McFall, a U of A research associate, who added that [memory decline](#) is one of the first signs of cognitive and neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's.

In collaboration with U of A neuroscientist Roger Dixon, McFall used machine learning to analyze data from a long-term study based in Edmonton.

She found that [adults](#) with healthy [memory](#) were more likely to be female, educated and engaged in more social activities, such as hosting a dinner party. They were also more likely to engage in new cognitive activities, such as using a computer or learning a second language.

For adults aged 55 to 75, healthy memory was associated with lower heart rate, higher body mass index, more self-maintenance activities, and living companions. Adults over 75 had faster gait and fewer depressive symptoms.

Those with declining memory tended to engage in fewer new cognitive activities. Younger adults aged 55 to 75 had higher heart rates and engaged in fewer self-maintenance activities, while adults over age 75 had slower gait and engaged in fewer [social activities](#).

"These modifiable risk and protective factors may be converted to potential intervention targets for the dual purpose of promoting healthy memory aging or preventing or delaying accelerated decline, impairment and perhaps dementia," said McFall.

"For instance, clinicians might target specific groups with an intervention to increase new cognitive activities among men or improve mobility for those over age 75."

The study, "Modifiable Risk Factors Discriminate Memory Trajectories in Non-demented Aging: Precision Factors and Targets for Promoting Healthier Brain Aging and Preventing Dementia?" was published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*.

More information: G. Peggy McFall et al. Modifiable Risk Factors Discriminate Memory Trajectories in Non-Demented Aging: Precision Factors and Targets for Promoting Healthier Brain Aging and Preventing Dementia?, *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* (2019). [DOI: 10.3233/JAD-180571](https://doi.org/10.3233/JAD-180571)

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