

Spending time on household chores may improve brain health

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Engaging in household chores may be beneficial for brain health in older adults. In a recent Baycrest study, older adults who spent more time on household chores showed greater brain size, which is a strong predictor

of cognitive health.

"Scientists already know that exercise has a positive impact on the [brain](#), but our study is the first to show that the same may be true for household chores," says Noah Koblinsky, lead author of the study, Exercise Physiologist and Project Coordinator at Baycrest's Rotman Research Institute (RRI). "Understanding how different forms of physical activity contribute to brain health is crucial for developing strategies to reduce the risk of cognitive decline and dementia in older adults."

In this study, published in the journal *BMC Geriatrics*, the researchers looked at the links between household chores, brain volume and cognition in a group of 66 cognitively healthy older adults living in the community. The participants attended three assessment visits at Baycrest Hospital, including a health evaluation, structural brain imaging and cognitive assessment.

Participants were asked about the time they spent on household chores, such as tidying, dusting, meal preparation and clean up, shopping, heavy housework, yard work, home repairs and caregiving.

The researchers found that older adults who spent more time engaging in such activities had greater brain volume, regardless of how much exercise they did. This was observed in the hippocampus, which plays a major role in memory and learning, and the [frontal lobe](#), which is involved in many aspects of cognition.

Although it is possible that individuals with larger brains are more likely to take up household chores, there could be several explanations for the brain benefits of household physical activity.

First, we know that heart health is closely tied to brain health. It could be that household chores have a similar effect on the heart and [blood](#)

[vessels](#) as low-intensity aerobic exercise.

Second, the planning and organization involved in household chores may promote the formation of new neural connections over time, even as we age.

Third, it could be that the older adults who engaged in more household chores spent less time being sedentary, which has been shown to be associated with negative health outcomes, including poor [brain health](#).

"Besides helping to guide physical activity recommendations for [older adults](#), these findings may also motivate them to be more active, since [household chores](#) are a natural and often necessary aspect of many people's daily lives, and therefore appear more attainable," says Dr. Nicole Anderson, Senior Scientist at the RRI, Director of the Ben and Hilda Katz Interprofessional Research Program in Geriatric and Dementia Care, and senior author of this study.

This study was funded in part by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

As a next step, the researchers would like to assess household [physical activity](#) more objectively using wearable technology. With additional funding, they could also plan controlled trials with the aim of increasing individuals' household activity and studying brain changes over time.

Provided by Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care

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