

You're never too old to learn

14 September 2009

Dr. Lixia Yang (above) and her co-author, Ralf Krampe of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Germany, found that seniors were able to retain 50 per cent of concepts they learned almost a year before.

That old saying, “your mind as is sharp as a steel trap”, seems to hold true for seniors well into their 80s, according to a new study by led by a Ryerson University researcher.

In a study published in the August issue of the *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, Dr. Lixia Yang of Ryerson University and her co-author, Ralf Krampe of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Germany, found that seniors were able to retain 50 per cent of concepts they learned almost a year ago.

“This finding was astonishing,” says Dr. Yang, who is the study’s lead author and heads up the Cognitive Aging Lab at Ryerson’s Department of Psychology. “We always assumed that seniors would have great difficulty in grasping new concepts and maintaining what they’ve learned. But our research demonstrates this is not always the case.”

Forty-seven seniors in their 70s and 80s completed a series of tests that measured three areas that normally decline with age: reasoning, processing speed and visual attention. They then repeated the same tests eight months later in a follow-up study. For example, to test the older adults’ [visual attention](#), one test involved finding “target” letters, like the letter “D” with dots above and below, among other letters with similar patterns as fast as possible.

“This study suggests that [seniors](#)’ minds are still sharp, and they can be productive members of the workplace, as long as they receive appropriate training,” says Dr. Yang.

Source: Ryerson University

APA citation: You're never too old to learn (2009, September 14) retrieved 18 September 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-09-youre.html>

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