

Heart health as young adult linked to mental function in mid-life

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Being heart healthy as a young adult may increase your chance of staying mentally sharp in mid-life, according to new research in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation*.

In a 25-year study on 3,381 people, 18- to 30-years-old, those with [blood pressure](#), [blood sugar](#) and [cholesterol levels](#) slightly higher than the Association's recommended guidelines, scored lower on cognitive function tests in their 40s and 50s. Standardized scores on three cognitive tests were between 0.06 to 0.30 points less, on average, for each [standard deviation](#) increase in cumulative exposure to these risk factors, which the researchers considered significant for this age group. Standard deviation is the amount of variation from the average.

"It's amazing that as a young adult, mildly elevated cardiovascular risks seem to matter for your brain health later in life," said Kristine Yaffe, M.D., study author and a neuropsychiatrist, epidemiologist and professor at the University of California-San Francisco. "We're not talking about old age issues, but lifelong issues."

This is one of the first comprehensive long-term studies looking at key heart disease and stroke risk factors' effects on cognitive function in this age group. Prior research showed similar effects of mid-life and late-life cardiovascular health on brainpower in late life.

The study was part of the ongoing multi-center Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA) Study. Participants had their

blood pressure, fasting blood sugar and cholesterol levels checked every two to five years. Researchers analyzed each person's cumulative cardiovascular health over 25 years. The American Heart Association defines ideal cardiovascular health as [systolic blood pressure](#)

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