

Exercise Preserves Cognition in Patients With Hypertension



People with high blood pressure have an increased risk of cognitive impairment, including dementia. However, a new study by researchers at Wake Forest University School of Medicine indicates that participating in physical activity more than once a week can reduce this risk. The findings are published in *Alzheimer's & Dementia*.

The researchers explain that physical exercise offers numerous benefits, including improved heart health, lower blood pressure and potentially delaying cognitive decline. However, the specific amount and intensity of exercise required to maintain cognitive health is still unclear.

In 2015, the landmark Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT) revealed that intensive blood pressure management reduces cardiovascular disease and lowers the risk of death.

SPRINT, which began in 2009, included over 9,300 participants with hypertension aged 50 and older, recruited from about 100 medical centres and clinical practices across the United States. Participants were randomly assigned to achieve a systolic blood pressure goal of <120 mm Hg (intensive treatment) or <140 mm Hg (standard treatment). The National Institutes of Health stopped the intervention early to disseminate the significant preliminary results, leading to new guidelines for blood pressure control.

In 2019, the ancillary SPRINT MIND trial, led by Wake Forest University School of Medicine, demonstrated that intensive blood pressure control in older adults reduced the risk of mild cognitive impairment, an early indicator of dementia.

A secondary analysis of the SPRINT MIND study investigated the impact of self-reported vigorous physical activity (at least once a week) on the risk of mild cognitive impairment and dementia.

The analysis showed that individuals who engaged in one or more sessions of vigorous physical activity per week had lower rates of mild cognitive impairment and dementia.

Researchers note that nearly 60% of study participants engaged in physical activity at least once a week, including those aged 75 and older. This suggests that those who understand the importance of exercise are more likely to engage in higher-intensity activities.

However, the research team found that the protective effect of vigorous exercise was more pronounced in individuals under 75. The researchers conclude that while this study supports the idea that vigorous exercise may help preserve cognitive function in high-risk patients with hypertension, further research is needed to include device-based physical activity measurements and more diverse participant populations.

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