

Build Your Brain

By Joan Maiden

The fear of losing our mental capacity often outweighs the fear of losing our physical ability. We know that exercise is good for our body, but is it also good for our brain?

Aerobic exercise has long been found to be beneficial for the brain. It increases blood flow to the brain, increases the production of nerve protecting compounds, and may slow the development of Alzheimer's disease. Scientists are now starting to look at the effect of weight lifting on the brain as well. What they found is:

- "Weight lifting facilitates neurogenerative, neuroadaptive and neuroprotective processes."
- "Gives the brain the ability to make new connections in order to improve, learning, critical thinking and memory."

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In other words, it rewires and builds our brain. We knew weight lifting would build muscles; now we know that it will also build the brain. In a study of older adults, those who lifted weights twice per week displayed significantly less shrinkage and tattering of their white matter than those who did not. A study at Georgia Tech found that twenty



minutes of weight lifting a couple of times a week can improve memory by 10%. One year-long study found that adults who exercised were enlarging their brain's memory center by one to two percent per year, where typically that center would decline in size with age.

If aerobic exercise is good for you and weight lifting is good for you, what is the effect of combining the two? They go hand-in-hand and together have a greater impact than either one alone. The combination may actually reduce cognitive decline by as much as 50%

Our muscles, like our brains, tend to shrink with age. Now we know that the same exercises, a combination of aerobics such as walking and weight lifting can reduce and reverse this shrinkage. So how much is enough? Visiting the gym once per week probably isn't enough, but just twenty minutes, twice per week can make all the difference.

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