

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Exercise and Mental Fitness

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



While everyone recognizes that physical exercise is good for the heart and weight-bearing activities help stave off osteoporosis, it may be surprising to some to learn that physical exercise is profoundly beneficial for maintaining and even enhancing brain function. In fact, this is not new information as research dating back to the 1930's has shown that athletic activity speeds reaction time; i.e., how long it takes for a person's mind to tell the body what to do, like applying the brakes when the traffic light turns red. This is important as newer studies link faster reaction time with a reduced risk of dementia.

New research from the Mayo Clinic Study of Aging confirms that engaging in moderate physical exercise from two to five times per week is associated with a fairly remarkable reduction of risk for developing early signs of dementia. And these benefits were seen regardless of gender, age, education, or even the presence or absence of depression. The study evaluated the mental performance of individuals between the ages of 70 and 89 and questioned the subjects about their physical activity between ages 50 through 65. Moderate exercise included such activities as aerobics, brisk walking, golfing without a golf cart, swimming, yoga, tennis doubles, and martial arts. Light exercise, such as bowling, golfing with a cart, walking leisurely, stretching, or slow dancing, was not associated with the brain benefits of the more vigorous activities.

So if you want to remain sharp into your 70's and beyond, you may want to consider picking up the pace of your exercise program. Also, if you're not already exercising regularly, check with your doctor before beginning a more strenuous program. Remember, staying in shape physically can go a long way to keeping you in shape mentally.

David