Walking Improves Mental Fitness

Concerned that your memory isn’t what it used to be? Or your mental quickness has slowed down? Perhaps you’re not having as much “luck” at cards as you used to. There may be some good news in store. Some recent studies have shown that you may be able to improve your mental functioning by increasing your aerobic activity with exercise like walking even if you have been very inactive in the past.

Researchers at the University of Illinois studied inactive adults between the ages of 60 and 75 who began walking 15 minutes three times a week and gradually built up to walking 45 minutes each session by the end of six months. Three kinds of tests were done with the group of walkers and compared to a group of adults who simply did stretching and toning exercises. The three tests measured “stopping”, that is, the ability to quickly reconsider an activity and discontinue it if necessary, ability to switch back and forth between tasks easily, and the ability to focus on one thing while ignoring surrounding disruptive sounds.

The group of adults who walked three times a week had up to 25 percent quicker reaction times in all three tests compared to the toners and stretchers. So, what is it about walking that improved mental fitness? Well, researchers believe that the increased supply of oxygen to the brain resulting from the aerobic activity of walking was the reason for the improved mental agility. When a person performs aerobic activity on a regular basis, more oxygen gets to the brain tissues.

Aerobic activities include walking, either outside or on a treadmill, swimming, and bicycling. Remember
to start slowly when you begin a new activity if you are currently very inactive. Check with your doctor to make sure it's okay to begin any exercise program. Walking with a friend or in a group can be more fun than walking alone. You may want to check with your local shopping mall office to see if they have a walking program if you prefer to walk indoors. But as the weather gets cooler, it's much more pleasant to walk outside.

This is certainly good news for all of us - yet another benefit we can get from increasing our level of physical activity. Now, you just have to take the hardest step - the first one! Once you start experiencing some of the benefits, you'll want to continue!

Reference: Nature 1999;400:418-419

Baked Acorn Squash
1 medium acorn squash
2 tsp. brown sugar
1/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/8 tsp. cloves, ground
1 Tbs. low-fat margarine

1. Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Cut the squash in half and remove seeds. Spray glass baking dish with cooking spray. Place the squash, cut side down, in the baking dish and bake for 30-40 minutes.

2. Turn squash, cut side up. Add margarine and sprinkle with brown sugar, cinnamon, and cloves. Continue baking for another 10 minutes or until brown. 2 Servings

Serving size: ½ squash
Exchanges: 1 starch, 1 fat

Nutrition Information:
Calories: 112
Carbohydrate: 17 grams
Protein: 2 grams
Fat: 4 grams
Cholesterol: 0
Sodium: 50 milligrams
Fiber: 4 grams

Your Resources

Required IRA Distributions

Have you accumulated money in a traditional Individual Retirement Account (IRA)? If so, did you know that you must start taking distributions from your account by a certain age?

You cannot keep funds in your traditional IRA indefinitely. Eventually you must withdraw them. Generally, you must begin receiving distributions by April 1 of the year.
following the year in which you reach age 70½. If you do not make any withdrawals, or if distributions are less than the required minimum distribution for the year, you may have to pay a 50% excise tax on the amount not withdrawn as required. The tax is 50% of the difference between the minimum payout required for the tax year and the amount actually paid. Minimum distribution amounts are calculated using IRS Tables.

The requirements for withdrawing IRA funds differ depending on whether you are the IRA owner or the beneficiary of a decedent’s IRA.

**IRA owners.** If you are the owner of a traditional IRA, you must choose to withdraw the balance in your IRA in one of the following two ways:
1. By withdrawing the entire balance in your IRA by the required beginning date (defined below) or
2. By withdrawing periodic distributions of the balance in your IRA starting no later than the required beginning date.

**Required beginning date (RBD)--Age 70½ rule.** You must withdraw the entire balance in your traditional IRA or begin receiving periodic distributions by April 1 of the year following the year in which you reach age 70½.

**Periodic distributions.** If you choose to receive periodic distributions, you must receive at least a minimum amount for each year starting with the year you reach 70½ (your 70½ year). If you do not (or did not) receive the minimum in your 70½ year, then you must receive distributions for your 70½ year that reach the minimum amount by April 1 of the next year.
Distributions after the RBD. The required minimum distribution for any year after your 70½ year must be made by December 31 of that later year.

Beneficiaries. If you are the beneficiary of a decedent’s traditional IRA, the requirements you must satisfy for withdrawing the funds from that IRA depend on whether distributions have begun that satisfy the minimum distribution requirement.

Request to excuse the tax. If the excess accumulation is due to reasonable error and you have taken, or are taking, steps to remedy the insufficient distribution, you can request that the tax be excused.

File Code: FRM 2-7, Retirement Planning - IRAs

Your Relationships

Head Injury and Personality Change (Part 1)

Head injury (also known as brain injury) often results in personality and behavior changes. Brain injury can result from head trauma, such as from a fall or car crash, or from a stroke. Conditions such as Alzheimer’s may result in similar changes, as well.

Head injury survivors may experience a range of problems following a traumatic brain injury. Depending on the part of the brain affected and the severity of the injury, the result on any one individual can vary greatly. Personality changes, memory and judgment deficits, lack of impulse control, and poor concentration are all common. Behavioral changes can be stressful for families and caregivers who must learn to adapt their communication techniques, established relationships, and expectations of what the impaired person can or cannot do.

Personality Changes

Even a person who makes a “good” recovery may go through some personality changes. Family members must be careful to avoid always comparing the impaired person with the way he/she “used to be.” Personality changes are often an exaggeration of the person’s pre-injury personality in which personality traits become intensified. Some changes can be quite striking. Perhaps the head injury survivor used to be easy-going, energetic, and thoughtful and now seems easily
angered, self-absorbed, and unable to show enthusiasm for anything. Nonetheless, try not to criticize the impaired person’s deficits. This is sure to make the person feel frustrated, angry, or embarrassed.

**Memory Problems**

Head injury survivors may experience short-term memory problems and/or amnesia related to certain periods of time. Generally, new learning presents the greatest challenge to memory or remembering. In contrast, pre-injury knowledge is more easily retained.

- The ability to focus and concentrate are keys to addressing some short-term memory problems. Keep distractions (e.g., music, noise) to a minimum and focus on one task or train of thought at a time.
- Have the person repeat the name of a person or object, after you, if memory impairment is severe.
- Whenever possible, have the person write down key information (e.g., appointments, phone messages, list of chores).
- Keep to routines. Keep household objects in the same place. Use the same route to walk to the mail box or bus stop.

- If getting lost is a problem, label doors or color code doors inside the house or hang arrows to indicate directions. When going out, the person should be accompanied initially to ensure the route is understood. A simple map can be sketched from the bus stop to the house. And make sure that the person always carries his/her address and emergency phone numbers.

**Establishing Structure**

A structured environment can be essential in helping a head injury survivor relearn basic skills. A written routine schedule of activities and repetition make it easier to remember what’s expected and what to do next.

**Lack of emotion**

After a head injury, a person may lack emotional responses such as smiling, laughing, crying, anger, or enthusiasm or their responses may be inappropriate. This may be especially present during the earlier stages of recovery.


Dear Friend:

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Extension Service office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians.

Please contact your local Extension Service office for more information on these and related topics.

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