

[ALZHEIMER'S](#)

How You Can Ward Off Alzheimer's

by [Cindy Kuzma](#) July 25, 2011, 02:38 am EST

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He's forgotten that these all say "kick me."

Doctors have found a real way to prevent Alzheimer's disease, and it's not a pill, a surgery, or a glass of vino.

A well-designed new study in *Archives of Internal Medicine* finds older people who are more active are less likely to have memory problems.

This study is just the latest finding in a growing body of research on exercise and dementia. The findings don't surprise experts, who say physical activity is now seen as a proven way to prevent Alzheimer's disease.

New Research Strengthens Case that Activity Prevents Dementia

The Archives study didn't just rely on people's own reports of how much they moved, which can be wrong. Researchers objectively measured participant's activities over a 2-week period.

The results: Five years later, 17 percent of the mostly-sedentary subjects developed cognitive impairment—the thinking, learning and memory problems that precede Alzheimer's disease.

That's compared with less than 2 percent of the most-active people. And in a second study published in the same journal, women who took the equivalent of a brisk, 30-minute walk every day had brains that were 5 to 7 years younger, as determined by a battery of mental skills tests.

These studies don't prove cause and effect. But several clinical trials have also demonstrated that exercise protects memory, says Eric Larson, M.D., M.P.H., from Group Health Research Institute in Seattle, who wrote an editorial about the new study.

For instance, a 2008 paper in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed men and women assigned to complete a 6-month walking program had more memory improvements 2 years later than those who weren't encouraged to exercise.

How Exercise Could Protect Your Mind

What's the connection? One possibility, experts say: Physical activity reduces your risk for conditions like obesity, diabetes and heart disease. "We think of these conditions as being outside the brain, but they actually confer a greater risk of cognitive problems," says J. Carson Smith, Ph.D., a researcher at the University of Maryland School of Public Health.

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Another recent study found walking regularly increased the size of the hippocampus, a brain area key to memory. This could be because, as Smith's studies have used MRIs to show, blood flow to the brain increases after a workout.

Is Alzheimer's in Your Future?

If your parents or grandparents had Alzheimer's disease, you have an extra incentive to work out: "If you have a genetic risk for Alzheimer's disease but you are physically active, your risk is reduced substantially and is probably the same as a person without that risk factor," Dr. Smith says.

Dr. Larson recommends 30 minutes a day, five days a week, but says any exercise is better than no exercise; while most of the research examined aerobic exercise, resistance training probably helps, too, Dr. Smith says.

Need help getting started? Find the [best workout for your 20s, 30s, 40s, and beyond](#).

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