

Early fitness may improve middle-age brain

By Gretchen Reynolds, New York Times

The more physically active you are at age 25, the better your thinking tends to be when you reach middle age, according to a large-scale study. Encouragingly, the findings also suggest that if you negligently neglected to exercise when young, you can start now and still improve the health of your brain.

Those of us past age 40 are generally familiar with those first glimmerings of forgetfulness and muddled thinking. We can't easily recall people's names, certain words, or where we left the car keys. "It's what we scientists call having a C.R.S. problem," said David R. Jacobs, a professor of public health at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and a co-author of the new study. "You can't remember stuff."

But these slight, midlife declines in thinking skills strike some people later or less severely than others, and scientists have not known why. Genetics almost certainly play a role, most researchers agree. Yet the contribution of lifestyle, and in particular of exercise habits, has been unclear.

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