

Study: How Exercise Reverses Effects of Aging

Exercise not only makes you feel better—boosting mental and physical fitness—but it also makes older people resemble much younger people physiologically, according to a new study.

The new findings on the beneficial effects of exercise on aging, by researchers at King's College London, suggest that conventional notions about the inevitability of physical decline as we grow older may be incorrect. In fact, how well we age is, to a large degree, up to us, the researchers said, as *The New York Times* reports.

Many scientific studies have shown that many bodily and cellular processes decline as we age. But the new research, published in *The Journal of Physiology*, aimed to track the health of older people who remain physically active to determine if exercise can slow, halt or even reverse those age-related processes.

“We wanted to understand what happens to the functioning of our bodies as we get older if we take the best-case scenario,” said Stephen Harridge, senior author of the study.

The scientists studied 85 men and 41 women—aged 55 to 79—who bicycle regularly, all of whom had a high degree of fitness. The volunteers ran through a gauntlet of physical and cognitive tests measuring endurance capacity, muscular mass and strength, pedaling power, metabolic health, balance, memory function, bone density and reflexes.

The researchers then compared the results of cyclists in the study to standard benchmarks of supposedly normal aging. The results indicated the cyclists did not appear to show their age and on almost all measures their physical functioning was much closer to those of young adults than others their own

age.

Even the oldest cyclists had younger people's levels of balance, reflexes, metabolic health and memory ability.

"If you gave this dataset to a clinician and asked him to predict the age" of one of the cyclists based on his or her test results, Harridge said, "it would be impossible." On paper, they all look young.

The study shows that "being physically active makes your body function on the inside more like a young person's," he added.

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