TuSalud

Some Seniors' Memory Rivals That of Young Adults

A remarkable group of seniors called "superagers" performed as well as young adults on memory tasks.

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Difficulty remembering people, places and events is usually considered an inevitable side effect of aging. But study findings published in the medical journal Cerebral Cortex show that for certain individuals in their 60s, 70s and 80s, the ability to recall memories equals that of those many years younger, reports ScienceAlert.com.

For the study, researchers from Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) scanned the brains of 40 older adults with an average age of 67 and 41 young adults with an average age of 25 as they tried to memorize 80 pairs of words connected with faces or scenes during a memory exercise.

Researchers checked two specific areas of the brain's visual cortex. One part of the brain was involved with the recognition of objects and faces, and the other played a role in encoding and retrieving memories. Results showed that the brain activity pattern in these two areas was similar between older and younger adults.

Additionally, among all participants, the brains of those who performed well on the activity reflected more youthful activation patterns. The scans of older individuals who excelled at recalling image-word pairs they had previously seen showed activation in the same areas of their brain as when they first saw the pairings.

"The superagers had maintained the same high level of neural differentiation, or selectivity, as a young adult," said Yuta Katsumi, PhD, a psychologist from MGH and lead author of the study. "Their brains enabled them to create distinct representations of the different categories of visual information so that they could accurately remember the image-word pairs."

Researchers acknowledged that two big limitations of the study are the small number of participants and the lack of focus on other areas of the brain. However, scientists believe that follow-up inquiries about the exceptional ability of superagers to recall visual information are warranted.

Investigators believe that this may very well lead to an intervention that might stave off memory

loss for those with dementia.

To learn more about memory loss, read “My memory is terrible, especially when it comes to remembering names. Is this a symptom of Alzheimer’s?” and “Slipping Away.”

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