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Exercise Rewires Aging Brain's Learning Capabilities

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Monday, 07 Dec 2015 01:56 PM

Moderate levels of exercise are not only good for the body, but also the mind, according to a new study that links activity to an increase the brain's lifelong flexibility and capability for learning.

The visual cortex of the brain, which processes visual information, loses the ability to "rewire" itself with age, making it more difficult for adults to recover from injuries and illness, said Claudia Lunghi, a neuroscientist at the University of Pisa and one of the study's authors, ***The New York Times*** reports.

But exercise appears to improve the function of this part of the brain.

In a study published in the journal Current Biology, researchers asked 20 adults to watch a movie with one eye patched while relaxing in a chair. Later, the participants exercised on a stationary bike for 10-minute intervals while watching a movie.

Lunghi explained that when one eye is patched, the visual cortex compensates by increasing its activity level. Her team tested the imbalance in strength between the participants' eyes after the movie — a measure of changeability in the visual cortex and found it was more pronounced after exercise.

Lunghi and her colleagues suggested that exercise somehow increases the brain's plasticity and ability to rewire itself, which could boost learning and memory, even later in life.