

How 50 year olds can have the brain of a 25 year old, according to study



A popular phrase “older and wiser” refers to the fact that we as human beings gather more life experience and more valuable lessons as we age. But unfortunately, our neurological systems don’t always cooperate.

Individuals entering middle age and their senior years frequently seek out ways to keep their memories keen and their mental instincts sharp. And according to neuroscientist Sara Lazar of Mass General and Harvard Medical School, one “New Age-y” practice could help mature adults recapture the quick-thinking abilities of their youths.

Lazar tells [Inc.](#) that mindfulness meditation (a category of practices that includes yoga) has neurological properties that can restore the brain to a youthful level of agility.

She reached her conclusions after a series of experiments in which she tested the brain functions of dedicated meditators and compared them to a random control group.

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In addition to noting meditation's capacity for "decreasing stress, depression, and [anxiety](#), reducing pain and insomnia, and increasing quality of life," Lazar discovered that the 50-year-olds with a long (6-9 years minimum) history of meditation had the same amount of gray matter in their frontal cortexes (the area of the brain responsible for [memory](#) and decision-making) as individuals half their age.

However, Lazar found herself curious about whether briefer exposure to meditation practices could make a difference in cognitive development.

So, she conducted a second study, this time using volunteers with no meditation experience.

She exposed this group to an eight-week mindfulness program, and at the end of the practice, she found that the subjects experienced thickening in several regions of their brains, including the hippocampus (which manages learning and memory), the TPJ (which controls empathy and the ability to see things from multiple perspectives) and the pons (which generates neurotransmitters).

She also discovered a shrinking in the amygdalas — the part of the brain responsible for stress and aggression — of the subjects.

During her second study, Lazar determined that a meditation practice consisting of less than 30 minutes of mindfulness per day can make a difference in mental fitness. She encourages readers to take whatever time they can manage to focus on their own wellness, claiming that meditation is “a lot like exercise. Exercising three times a week is great. But if all you can do is just a little bit every day, that’s a good thing, too.”

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