

Variety and consistency are essential to keep the mind healthy

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For many adults, the mid-30's is a busy time. There's often career advancement, the start of a new family and associated responsibilities. It's also a critical time for how we diversify our days in order to stay up to speed. A new study from the University of South Florida (USF) finds a key piece to maintaining cognitive function throughout adulthood is to

engage in diverse activities regularly.

Researchers focused on seven common daily activities: paid work, time with children, chores, leisure, [physical activity](#), volunteering, and giving informal help. They reviewed two sets of data from 732 people ranging between the ages of 34 and 84 that was collected by the National Survey of Daily Experiences. Every day for eight consecutive days, each participant was asked if they partook in those activities and scored on an activity [diversity](#) score that captures both the breadth (variety) and evenness (consistency) of activity participation. The same group was queried ten years later. The study published in the *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences* found those who increased activity diversity over the decade exhibited higher levels of [cognitive functioning](#) than those who maintained lower or decreased activity diversity.

Their cognitive functioning was assessed using the Brief Test of Adult Cognition by Telephone (BTACTION) battery, which measures multiple dimensions of cognition, including working memory span, verbal fluency, attention, speed of processing, reasoning and verbal memory. Previous studies have examined how activity variety and frequency impact cognition. This is the first study to prove activity consistency is also essential, regardless of age.

"Results support the adage to 'use it or lose it' and may inform future interventions targeting the promotion of active lifestyles to include a wide variety of activities for their participants," said Soomi Lee, Ph.D., assistant professor in the USF College of Behavioral and Community Sciences. "Findings suggest that active and engaged lifestyles with diverse and regular activities are essential for our cognitive health."

Daily engagement results in greater accumulation of intellectual and social repertoires. Life experiences, such as educational attainment or leisure activities, can help compensate for progressing Alzheimer's

Disease. Conversely, a lack of activities or passive behavior, like binge watching TV, is associated with cognitive decline. While participants did keep their minds sharp, Lee says she did not find a correlation between activity diversity and episodic memory, which is known to decline with age. A previous study by Lee also shows that activity diversity is important for psychological well-being, especially for older adults. The current study shows that activity diversity matters for cognitive health across age groups and an active lifestyle is important for different domains of health.

Provided by University of South Florida

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