

Solo exercise is good for older brains, but exercise with others may be even better

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Exercise is beneficial in obvious ways like getting a leaner and stronger body, yet its benefits can also improve the brain, including in older adults. Socializing can also have cognitive benefits. Now, a study published in *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, not only found cognitive benefits of regular exercise among older people, it also found

even greater benefits when exercise is done with others.

The global number of dementia patients is expected to surpass 150 million by 2050. As a result, interest is rising in manageable activities, such as exercise and socializing, which may reduce the risk of age-related cognitive disorders.

"Exercise is manageable for many [older people](#), and we saw [cognitive benefits](#) from it compared with those who don't exercise," says study senior author Professor Tomohiro Okura from the University of Tsukuba. "But it's even more noteworthy that we found exercise's [benefits](#) rise—14.1 percentage points in our study—when performed with others and at least twice a week."

Professor Okura's study collected data on 4,358 older (averaging 76.9 ± 5.6 years) adults in a regional city about 100 km (~62 miles) north of central Tokyo. This took place in 2017 to obtain baseline data for how frequently these people exercised alone or with others. The study team also used a local government database to collect follow-up data on the people's cognitive condition over nearly 4 years.

The researchers analyzed and calculated the data to find the relation between [cognitive decline](#), exercise, and exercise with others. They found that participants who exercised alone twice or more weekly decreased their risk of developing cognitive impairment by 15.1%. Yet those who exercised with others twice or more weekly showed a 29.2% decrease.

Studies reinforce these findings in various ways. Exercise can provide favorable physical and mental outcomes. It can also reduce [chronic diseases](#) such as hypertension and diabetes. Exercising in groups introduces a social element, and socializing has also been found to potentially reduce the development of cognitive disorders.

"A majority of the [older adults](#) in our study took part in exercise by themselves, and we can see the cognitive benefits when they do so at least twice a week," Professor Okura says. "Adding in the social element, however, may make regular exercise all the more preventive. Adopting this habit could be extremely valuable."

Further studies now need to look at factors such as exercise intensity and type. These findings may inform the development of specialized exercise programs that combine [exercise](#) and dementia for the prevention of dementia and other related conditions.

More information: Koki Nagata et al, Impact of exercising alone and exercising with others on the risk of cognitive impairment among older Japanese adults, *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.archger.2022.104908](#)

Provided by University of Tsukuba

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