Exercise Improves Brain Function in People With HIV

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Physically active HIV-positive people are much more likely to have improved brain function over those who lead sedentary lives, HealthDay reports. Publishing their findings in Springer's Journal of NeuroVirology, researchers from the University of California, San Diego conducted a study of 335 people with HIV, interviewing them about their exercise habits over the previous three days.

Despite advances in antiretroviral (ARV) therapy, about half of people with HIV experience cognitive impairment of some kind. The findings of this study complement past research into the matter.

The investigators found that those who exercised were about half as likely to have evidence of neurocognitive impairment when compared with those who did not exercise. In addition, the active group had improved working memory and were able to process information more quickly.

Taking into account variables such as differences in HIV disease progression, substance use, mental health factors and physical functioning, the researchers theorized that exercise benefits the mental functioning because it lowers neurocognitive risk factors, including high blood pressure and high levels of fats in the blood. ARVs are also associated with an increase in diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity, which can negatively affect cognitive functioning.

"Exercise as a modifiable lifestyle behavior may reduce or potentially prevent neurocognitive impairment in HIV-infected persons," David J. Moore, PhD, an associate professor of psychiatry at UCSD, and one of the study's authors, said in a release. "Physical exercise, together with other modifiable lifestyle factors such as education, social engagement, cognitive stimulation and diet could be fruitful interventions to support people living with HIV."

To read the study abstract, click here.

To read a release on the study, click here.

To read the HealthDay story, click here.