

HYDRATION AND AGEING RESEARCH

Research shows staying hydrated, particularly in our elderly years, may slow down the ageing process and prevent or delay chronic disease.

As an Educational Kinesiologist and Brain Gym instructor, I will often email any research that I find that supports our Brain Gym/Educational Kinesiology work. This article fully supports the importance of hydration especially as we age.

I have been a Brain Gym instructor for nearly 30 years I also teach my workshop 'Brain Gym for Healthy and Active Ageing' and a modified Brain Gym 101 for Seniors. As well as being a tutor for the University of the Third Age, I also write a regular column on Brain Health for their newsletter. I regularly work with the elderly in nursing homes and in the general community as well as conducting Educational Kinesiology sessions in my clinic with many seniors (often the grandparents of the children I work with) who are having "too many senior moments" or brain fog. Any research that relates both to ageing and Brain Gym, I am very interested in.

During my sessions with seniors, I always explain the importance of drinking water to keep their brain switched on. Continually drinking small sips of plain water during the day will generally keep our brain sufficiently hydrated.

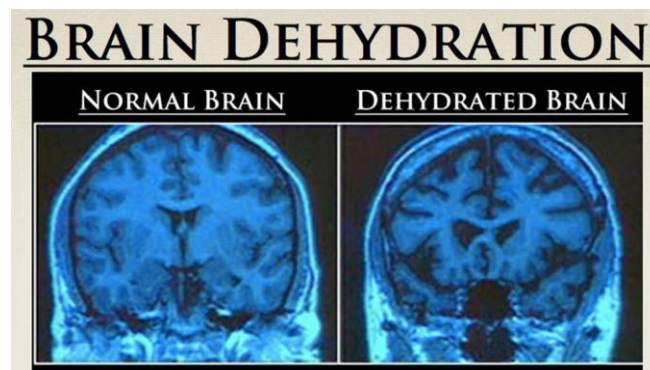
Brain Changes as We Age

Some changes happen to our brains as we age.

Brain Shrinkage

Starting at age 50, our brain gradually loses its volume in weight. the rate of shrinkage increasing around age 60. But the volume loss isn't uniform throughout the brain with some areas shrinking more, and faster, than other areas. The prefrontal cortex, cerebellum, and hippocampus show the biggest losses, which worsen in advanced age.

A lot of the shrinkage in our brain is from loss of water. Prolonged dehydration causes brain cells to shrink in size and mass, a condition common in many elderly people who have been dehydrated for years. What a powerful incentive to sip water frequently, especially as we get older, and such a simple thing to do!



Perception of Thirst

Age also affects our ability to stay hydrated and our ability to recognize when we need more water. As Research shows an older adult's perception of thirst is typically lower than young adults, hence the elderly tend to drink less water. Many still take the sensation of thirst as an indicator they need to drink but as you get older, thirst becomes a less reliable indicator that our body/brain needs water. Losing just 2 percent of the water in your body (mild dehydration), can impair your cognitive performance, attentiveness, short-term memory and affect decision-making ability.

Temperature Regulation

As we get older, drinking enough water is especially important because with age our body is less able to regulate our temperature, putting us at increased risk of heat-related illness.

Symptoms of dehydration in the elderly include

- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Apathy
- Confusion
- Depression
- Sleep issues
- Inability to focus (brain fog)

All of which are so evident in the elderly in nursing homes.

One nursing home near me that does Brain Gym every morning, have their residents drink their water from shot glasses regularly throughout the day, which they find hilarious and often pretend they are drinking their favourite alcohol. The residents find drinking out of smaller glasses less overwhelming than being confronted with larger glasses or cups. They often decorate their drinking glasses to match any theme they are celebrating.



Ageing and Unintegrated Reflexes

Continual dehydration also puts the elderly at higher risk of any unintegrated reflexes becoming more active and obvious again, I believe, is one of the leading causes of dementia. Over the years working in nursing homes, I have seen so many unintegrated reflex behaviours. I am actually writing a book on that very topic.

Having to deal with unintegrated reflexes puts enormous stress on a person's system, and the more stress a person is under, the higher the chances of dehydration. Under stress, we need at least three times more hydration just to survive. Add this to the stress of ageing, then the importance of drinking water as we age becomes even more crucial in keeping our brains switched on.

Research Links

A new study from the American National Institute of Health has found that adults who stay hydrated appear to live healthier, longer lives and less likely to suffer chronic condition such as heart and lung disease. Poorer hydration levels were associated with an increased risk of ageing faster, dying younger and developing chronic disease.

This research can be found at <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/good-hydration-linked-healthy-aging>

Another useful link is <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/hydration-key-to-longer-life-lower-chronic-disease-risk-study-shows>

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