

The Future Is Not Always Bleak When It Comes To Aging And Cognition

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Rayshell Clapper for redOrbit.com – Your Universe Online

Picture this: You pick up your cell phone to call a close family member, someone you know well and speak with on the phone often. Every time, you physically enter the phone number; you know this number by heart and have for many years. Suddenly, though, you can't remember the number to save your life. You stare at the phone, bewildered by the forgotten number. Frustration seeps in, and you feel your age.

Aging is not easy. First we notice wrinkles and skin issues. Then we move on to vision problems and aching bones and joints. Then the cognitive problems and issues begin. And the older we get, the worse many of these issues become. Most specifically, we struggle with cognitive processes and abilities, which is definitely the most frustrating. Things that were once easy to do and remember are no longer, all thanks to the aging process. But is there hope?

According to the Association for Psychological Science, the cognitive glass is not as half empty as once thought. In fact, it is definitely more half full. In a recent edition of *Perspectives in Psychological Science*,

several articles identify three ways that cognitive aging is not as bleak as once thought.

1. Motivation, Motivation, Motivation

In the first [article](#), motivation is key to keeping cognitive abilities sharp. In other words, the more motivated we are to challenge our cognition, the better off we will be. The study findings by North Carolina State University psychological scientist Thomas Hess show the following about motivation and cognitions:

“If the cognitive cost of engaging in difficult tasks increases as we age, older adults may be less motivated to expend limited cognitive resources on difficult tasks or on tasks that are not personally relevant to them. This selectivity, Hess argues, may allow older adults to improve performance on the tasks they do choose to engage in, thereby helping to account for inconsistencies between lab-based and real-world data.”

In other words, by picking and choosing what tasks to engage in, aging adults use their motivation to improve performances. We know that motivation is key in physical exercise, so it only stands to reason that it is also in mental exercise.

2. Bittersweet Memory

Memories are often [flawed](#) because we can't remember things perfectly, exactly as the experiences happened. It turns out that prior knowledge (in other words memory) plays a difficult role in cognition. On the one hand, it fills in gaps when adults struggle with failure of episodic memory. However, on the other, it may also prevent learning and retaining new knowledge. The researchers, Sharda Umanath and Elizabeth Marsh of Duke University, state that more research is necessary to truly understand the roles that memory and prior knowledge play in cognitive abilities.

3. Fraud Alert

We hear on the news and from academics and professionals how older adults are prime victims of consumer fraud due to their aging cognition issues. However, another [article](#) states the following:

“Psychological scientists Michael Ross, Igor Grossmann, and Emily Schryer of the University of Waterloo in Canada review the available data to examine whether incidences of consumer fraud are actually higher among older adults. While there isn't much research that directly answers this question, the research that does exist suggests that older adults may be less frequent victims than other age groups.”

These psychological scientists explain that older adults are no less vulnerable to fraud than others, or at least there is no evidence of this. Instead of focusing on scaring older adults, fraud prevention needs to be focused on consumers of all ages, and this only makes sense. Identity theft happens to people of all ages, young or old, child or adult.

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