

# Move Your Body, Protect Your Brain: What the U.S. POINTER Study Means for You

If you've ever wondered whether exercise really makes a difference for your brain, the science now has a clear answer: yes — and the proof comes from one of the most important brain health studies of our time.

**Exercise is one of the most powerful tools we have for protecting cognitive health.** In the landmark U.S. POINTER study, published in JAMA in 2025, researchers followed more than 2,000 older adults at risk for cognitive decline. The most successful participants followed a structured plan that included 30–35 minutes of moderate-to-intense aerobic activity four times a week, along with strength and flexibility training — and it made a measurable difference in how their brains aged.

**Structure and accountability matter more than willpower alone.** The participants who saw the greatest benefit didn't just "try to be more active." They followed a prescribed activity program with specific, measurable goals, and met regularly with a peer support team over two years. It's a powerful reminder that having a plan — and a little accountability — can carry us further than good intentions ever will.

**And the results were real, not just theoretical.** After two years, the group following the structured program showed a statistically significant improvement in global cognitive function compared to those who were simply encouraged to make their own changes. This is one of the first large-scale studies to prove, not just suggest, that a structured lifestyle program can protect the aging brain.

**These benefits held up across the board.** One of the most encouraging findings was that the cognitive benefits were consistent across age, sex, ethnicity, heart health status, and even APOE-e4 genotype — the gene variant associated with higher Alzheimer's risk. In other words, this isn't a benefit reserved for a lucky few. It's available to nearly everyone willing to commit to the plan.

**Exercise works best as part of a bigger picture.** In POINTER, physical activity wasn't a stand-alone strategy — it was paired with heart-healthy nutrition, cognitive stimulation, social engagement, and regular health monitoring. Movement matters most when it's part of a fuller lifestyle approach to brain health.

**Your brain's processing speed can be trained too.** Complementary research from the ACTIVE study found that a specific type of cognitive speed-of-processing training reduced long-term dementia risk by 29% — and it took only a modest amount of training to see the benefit. Pairing physical movement with this kind of brain training may offer even greater protection.

**The bottom line: the science backs it up.** U.S. POINTER is the first large-scale, randomized clinical trial to show that accessible, sustainable lifestyle changes — including regular exercise — can protect cognitive function in diverse communities across the country. You don't need a perfect routine or a gym membership. You need a plan, some support, and the willingness to start.

*It's never too late to start moving for your brain.*

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