



Name:

Date:

SuperAgers

People around the world are living longer. One problem that affects many older people, though, is memory loss. Usually, this is just an inconvenience, but it can be a sign of brain disease. Scientists have been studying the brains of people suffering from memory loss in the hope of finding a way to treat the problem. Researchers at Northwestern University in Chicago, however, decided to take a different approach. They began looking at the brains of people who still have strong and healthy memories even as they get older.

The team of researchers calls these people “SuperAgers.” The researchers asked people over the age of 80 who believed they had unusually good memories to take part in the project. To determine if these people truly had good memories, the researchers first tested a group of people between the ages of 50 and 65. Then, they gave the same test to the people over 80 and compared the results. All those who scored as well as the younger group were considered to be SuperAgers. This, however, only amounted to about 10 percent of those who had volunteered.

After this, the brains of the younger group and those of the SuperAgers were scanned. The researchers were surprised to find that the brains of the SuperAgers looked just as healthy as - and in some ways healthier than - those of the younger group. In particular, the outer layer of the brain, known as the cortex, was thicker than the people in the younger group. This part of the brain is connected to both memory and thinking. Moreover, the part of the brain that helps people pay attention was also thicker than is normally the case with older people.

The SuperAgers not only had good memories but were also more energetic and active than other people the same age. This goes along with other studies which have shown that people who participate in many activities and are involved in their communities are less likely to suffer from brain problems. What scientists do not yet know, though, is whether such people are born with genetically stronger brains or whether it is their diet and lifestyle that keep their brains healthier.



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1. What are researchers at Northwestern University doing about memory loss?
 - a. They are studying the brains of people who have good memories in their old age.
 - b. They are focusing on cases where memory loss is not caused by brain disease.
 - c. They are trying to reduce the effects of brain diseases on people's memories.
 - d. They are looking for a way to reduce the inconvenience of memory loss.

2. In the study, "SuperAgers" were defined as
 - a. people over 80 who answered at least 10 percent of the test questions correctly.
 - b. people over 80 whose memories are as good as people in their 50s and early 60s.
 - c. people between 50 and 65 whose memories are better than average for their age.
 - d. people between 50 and 65 who are likely to live a healthy life through their 80s.

3. What were researchers surprised to learn about the SuperAgers?
 - a. They got along better with younger people than with people of their own age.
 - b. They had better memories than others but are not as good at paying attention.
 - c. There were no differences between their brains and those of other people their age.
 - d. The part of their brain related to memory and thinking was unusually healthy.

4. What does evidence from a variety of studies suggest?
 - a. Some people are unlikely to be able to improve their memories through practice and exercise.
 - b. Most people with strong brains are genetically different from people with normal brains.
 - c. Living an active and social life is related to the health of people's brains.
 - d. Eating healthily before exercising has a positive effect on people's memories.