

Neuroscience Says 6 to 10 Minutes a Day Can Make You Smarter and More Focused, and Even Increase the Size of Your Brain

In the same way that more than 80 percent of people surveyed think they are above-average drivers, and fewer than 1 percent consider themselves "worse than average" (each a mathematical impossibility), I like to think I'm smart. Not extremely smart. Not super smart. Just smart.

Fortunately, it's possible to improve your ability to learn, retain, and use what you learn. But that takes a lot of work. Or not!

If you want to increase your learning speed, make smarter decisions, and increase your overall level of intelligence, a study published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* found that just 6 to 10 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise can improve your working memory and significantly improve higher-level cognitive skills like organization, prioritization, and planning.

If you're wondering, moderate exertion involves things like fast walking, slow jogging, climbing stairs, any activity that will still allow you to carry on a conversation. "Vigorous exertion" is just what it sounds like: cycling, swimming, HIIT workouts, fast jogging, etc.

Yep: if you want to get smarter, get moving for at least six minutes a day.

Or more, if you like. The study found that the more time you spend exercising -- obviously up to a point -- the greater the mental benefits. And, of course, the physical benefits.

Other research agrees. For one thing, exercise can slow or even reverse the physical decay of your brain. Contrary to conventional wisdom, new brain cells can be created: Research shows exercise can increase the size of your hippocampus, even in your 60s and 70s.

Then again, if six to 10 minutes sounds like too much, a review of a number of studies published found that even "aerobic exercise for two minutes at moderate-to-high intensity improved attention, concentration, and learning and memory functions for up to two hours."

If you want a longer-term boost, a recent study found that participants who walked briskly for 40 minutes, three times a week, increased hippocampal volume by slightly over 2 percent.

Sum it all up, and a few minutes of exercise will help improve learning and memory. A few more minutes will improve your planning and organizational skills. Movement makes you smarter.

And healthier.