

Study: Mental declines can be reversed

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As we move past retirement age, most of us will not be as mentally sharp as we once were, but a study suggests we may be able to reverse the trend. Dennis Foth, a professor in the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension, says some people might have that talent.

Foth and Gordon Thompson of the University of Saskatchewan found in their literature review that mental declines related to aging aren't universal and affect different parts of our cognitive capacities to varying degrees.

Foth said mental declines are pathological for about 10 percent of the population over the age of 65, and not much can be done at this time for the debilitating cognitive effects of diseases such as Alzheimer's disease. But for the other 90 percent of the population, cognitive decline need not be inevitable.

"A lifetime of good mental habits pays off," Foth said. "People who are curious at a young age are more likely to be mentally active and stay active as they age. And we found it is never too late to start. With a little effort, even people in their 70s and 80s can see dramatic improvements in their cognitive skills."

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