

Study: Our brains compensate for aging

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Yale University and University of Illinois scientists say they've determined our brains compensate for aging by becoming less "specialized."

One of two separate areas of the brain light up when younger people look at a house or a face, but each image activates both areas of the brain at the same time in older persons, the study said.

Christy Marshuetz, a Yale assistant professor of psychology and a co-author of the study, said although researchers aren't certain, they believe the extra activity in older adults is probably compensation for age-related changes in brain volume or efficiency.

The scientists hypothesized that even when consciously remembering specific items, older adults show decreased specialization in the fusiform face area of the brain and the parahippocampal place area of the brain when compared with younger adults.

"Our findings are the first to demonstrate decreased neural specialization in the ventral visual cortex in older adults, along with increased activations in the prefrontal cortex," Marshuetz said. "This underscores the importance of taking into account the connected and networked nature of the brain and its function in understanding human neural aging."

The study appears in the journal *NeuroReport*.

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