



## Music Training May Help Keep Aging Brain Healthy

### **Older people with the most musical experience scored highest on cognitive tests, study shows**

Music lessons may help keep the brain healthy as people grow older, a new study suggests.

Researchers from the University of Kansas Medical Center divided 70 healthy adults, ages 60 to 83, into three groups based on their amount of musical experience: no musical training, one to nine years of music lessons, and at least 10 years of musical study.

More than half of those with a music background studied piano, about one-quarter played woodwind instruments such as the flute or clarinet, and others played string instruments, percussion or brass instruments.

The participants -- who had similar fitness and education levels and were free of Alzheimer's disease -- were given several cognitive tests. Those with the greatest amount of musical experience did best on these tests of mental acuity, followed by those with less musical study and those who never took music lessons.

Compared to non-musicians, the people with a high degree of musical experience had much higher scores on the cognitive tests, including those related to visuospatial memory, naming objects, and the [brain's ability](#) to adapt to new information (cognitive flexibility).

The benefits of musical study were still apparent even in those who no longer played an instrument, the researchers said.

"Musical activity throughout life may serve as a challenging cognitive exercise, making your brain fitter and more capable of accommodating the challenges of aging," lead researcher Brenda Hanna-Pladdy said in a journal news release.

Hanna-Pladdy, now an assistant professor in neurology at Emory University School of Medicine, added, "Since studying an instrument requires years of practice and learning, it may create alternate connections in the brain that could compensate for cognitive declines as we get older."

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