

Can cycling and other low impact exercise make me smarter?

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You have probably heard that aerobic exercise is important for brain health, but here is some good news: studies show that low-impact exercise and activities can also boost the brain. For example, gardening, swimming, and dancing have all been found to benefit the brain. For instance, engaging activities that include varied movement, like gardening, can be counted as low-impact exercise. The movements involved in gardening, like digging, weeding, and planting may seem like gentle movements but they can build flexibility and strength and get the heart rate up a bit. Perhaps even more importantly, because gardening is usually something done out of passion instead of a sense of duty, people are much more likely to do it often.

Another low-impact exercise that can benefit the brain is swimming. Although swimming is a low-impact exercise, a [study](#) found that blood flow is increased when you exercise in water as opposed to exercising on land.

There has been a fair amount of research on dancing, which is another low-impact exercise that can benefit the brain. [Studies](#) have shown that doing complex ballroom dances like the tango benefits the brain. And one researcher even hooks people up to EEG machines while they tango so she can study the impacts of ballroom dance on the brain.

A recent study from the [Netherlands](#) found that people who used an exercise bike for 6 months saw an increased density and connectivity in their brain's white matter. The finding was seen in both people with schizophrenia and people with no clinical diagnosis.

A second study from [Taiwan](#) found that people with diabetes or metabolic syndrome who used a stationary bike for 12 weeks experienced an increase of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a brain chemical involved in supporting neural plasticity processes by encouraging the growth and differentiation of new neurons and synapses.

The bottom line: you don't have to train for a marathon or sweat profusely to get brain benefits from exercise. You may be better off doing things you really enjoy that engage your body in low-impact exercise while your brain gets a workout too.