



Ever too late?

In Minnesota there is a remote nunnery, home to the nuns of Mankato. Many of these nuns live for over 100 years. David Snowdon from the university of Kentucky has studied them. The nuns as a group have a lower rate of Alzheimer's disease than the general population.

They believe that idleness is a sin so they are always busy. The oldest nuns can often be found busying themselves with a quiz or puzzle (or even a political debate). Snowdon has studied one hundred brains donated by the deceased members of the order and can actually see that there are healthy connections between the neurons.

Interestingly the nuns with better linguistic skills faired better than their sisters who had poorer skills. The continued mental challenging created an enriched environment for their brains to continue to make new connections.



Good news about good habits

Warner Schaie and Sherry Willis from the Pennsylvania State University carried out a study with people aged 64 to 95 years old. Each of the subjects had suffered cognitive decline in a variety of mental functions over the previous 14 years. They underwent a brief cognitive training program and then went through lots of tests. What was found was that the decline was reversible. They could halt the negative downward spiral and replace it with a positive upwards one.

The even better news was that the cognitive recovery was generalised, this means that it had positive effects in lots of different ways, not just the ways the training had direct links to. The effects also lasted; they could be observed 7 years after the training. The benefits of getting good habits in place could be far-reaching and lasting for you too.