

You Are What You Think, New Study Shows

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By: Yagana Shah

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks," you might joke. Or think to yourself, "I'm too old to do that." Stop it, we beg you. A new study shows perceptions of age are as good as reality when it comes to physical functioning.

Researchers from Yale University and University of California, Berkeley **set out to find out just how powerful negative -- or positive-- stereotypes or perceptions of aging can be.**

The study, published in the journal Psychological Science, found implicit exposure to positive associations with aging were shown to be more effective on physical abilities than a similar study which prescribed six months of exercise!

"Negative age stereotypes that older individuals assimilate from their culture predict detrimental outcomes, including worse physical function," the study's authors wrote.

A total of 100 subjects between ages 61 and 99 were split into four groups. A control group, an implicit intervention group, an explicit intervention group and a implicit-explicit intervention group. According to The New York Times, implicit intervention consisted of subjects coming in for 15-minute sessions, once a week for four weeks. They were shown a smattering of words like wise and spry, coupled with words like senior and old. The explicit intervention group was asked to write about fit, active older people.

After four sessions and follow-up at one and three weeks, they were given physical tests like their ability to walk, balance and get up from a chair. There were no improvements in the explicit intervention group, but the implicit intervention group showed considerable improvements in their fitness.

"People have encountered negative stereotypes for so long, in media and marketing and everyday conversations, that people build up ways to hold onto them. Implicit interventions can bypass that," Yale researcher Becca Levy told The New York Times.

Indeed perceptions have shown to be powerful in a number of studies, like one Texas A&M study which found older subjects felt an average of five years older after having to



take a memory test, due to stereotypes of aging and memory loss, even if there was really nothing wrong with their performance.

Just a reminder of the power of positive thinking.

Lorie Eber is a Mayo Clinic trained Wellness Coach, NASM Certified Personal Trainer, Gerontologist and author. Lorie Eber Wellness Coaching provides healthy lifestyle guidance one-on-one and in group settings.