

Exercise for two minutes a week to cut dementia risk

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Scotland's population is ageing, which will put more strain on the NHS RUI VIEIRA/PA

A mere two minutes of vigorous exercise a week can reduce the risk of age-related illnesses such as dementia, according to Scottish scientists.

Seventeen people aged between 60 and 75 took part in two training sessions a week for ten weeks for the study, carried out by researchers from Abertay University. They were asked to cycle as hard as they could on a stationary bike for six seconds before resting. They repeated the process until they achieved a total of one minute of high intensity exercise in each session.

Each participant had hypertension, a risk factor for dementia, and was on medication to control their blood pressure. By the end of the study, their blood pressure had fallen to normal, healthy levels. This happened without any change in medication or diet.

Within the next five years almost a third of Scotland's population is expected to be over 60 and age-related illnesses will put more strain on the NHS.

John Babraj, a lecturer in exercise physiology who led the study, said that the implications could be massive. He said: “What we’ve seen with this simple exercise is a reduction in blood pressure which could potentially lead to a reduction in long-term frailty and in the extent of dementia in older people.

“This form of exercise is unique because you’re asking people to work as hard as they can. The stress being put on the body forces it to change. It’s making the body adapt to what we’re doing and that’s why this exercise has so many long-term health benefits.

“We’d now like to do a longer study to explore the link between the decline in physical function and the decline in brain function. They seem to be interrelated and as the population grows older it’s increasingly important that we find non-pharmaceutical ways of dealing with age-related issues.”