



Mental Fatigue May Depend on More Than Your Age

Transcript

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00:00:00 [Music]

00:00:04 Announcer/Bella

Welcome to Real Life Science, where we bring you clear and accessible summaries of peer -reviewed research to help you make informed decisions about care, work, and living. Today, we're exploring mental fatigue and how it relates not just to age as a number, but to your brain's health and function. Discover why brain age might matter more than your birth date when it comes to feeling mentally drained and what you can do to stay sharp and energized.

00:00:35 Narrator

Let's take a closer look at the key findings, who participated in the study, why this research matters, and what you can do to protect your brain health and manage fatigue effectively. Do you feel mentally drained after focusing for a long time? That's called cognitive fatigue, a type of tiredness that comes from sustained mental effort. It can affect your ability to concentrate, make decisions, and stay productive.

Fatigue isn't limited to illness. It's common in everyday life. About 1 in 5 adults report ongoing fatigue even without a medical condition. Many people assume that fatigue gets worse as we age. But scientists are now asking a different question. Does cognitive fatigue relate more to chronological age or to brain age or how old your brain appears?

So, what did the researchers find about brain age and mental fatigue? Let's take a closer look at the key findings, who participated in the study, why this research matters, and what you can do to protect your brain health and manage fatigue effectively. First, let's explore the key findings from the study and what they reveal about the relationship between brain age and cognitive fatigue.



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Older adults reported less fatigue at the start of mental tasks. However, people whose brains appeared older on MRI became fatigued more quickly over time. Overall brain age, not chronological age, was linked to how quickly fatigue develops. In addition, younger adults changed how they performed as they became fatigued, while older adults used different strategies to stay accurate. These differences were also reflected in brain activity, with regions involved in fatigue functioning differently across the lifespan.

Next, let's look at who took part in this research, and how the participants were selected to ensure reliable results. The study included 85 healthy adults between the ages of 20 and 84. All participants were free of neurological or psychiatric conditions and were not taking medications that could affect thinking or brain activity.

They completed tasks designed to require sustained mental effort while researchers measured their fatigue levels. Brain scans were also used to estimate each person's brain age based on brain structure.

Now, why do these findings matter to you and what do they tell us about aging and brain health?

Let's dive into the implications of the study.

This study challenged a common belief that fatigue simply increases with age. Instead, the findings suggest:

- Feeling less fatigued at the start of a task may be a normal part of aging
- But how quickly fatigue develops may signal changes in brain health
- Two people the same age may experience fatigue very differently depending on their brain health



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Overall, this is one of the first large studies to look at how both age and brain health relate to fatigue.

Understanding these differences could help researchers develop better ways to measure and treat fatigue, especially in conditions like multiple sclerosis or brain injury.

Finally, we'll share practical tips on what you can do to manage mental fatigue and support your brain health every day.

- Pay attention to how quickly you feel mentally tired, not just how tired you feel.
- Take regular breaks during demanding tasks.
- Talk to your doctor if fatigue interferes with daily life. Stay mentally and physically active to support brain health.

Those simple steps can make a real difference in managing mental fatigue and keeping your brain in top shape.

00:3:55 [Music]

00:3:58 Announcer/Bella

Visit our website and follow us on social media. A link to the full study discussed today is included in the program notes for those who want to learn more. Remember, staying informed is a key part of taking care of yourself. Until next time, keep your mind active and your brain healthy.