

**Safety and Education**  
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**New Research Shows High-Intensity Exercise Benefits Older Adults**

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO ADD SOME HIIT WORKOUTS TO YOUR SCHEDULE.

By Elizabeth Millard / Published May 5, 2023 / Bicycling.com

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**INTRODUCTION**

- A new study found that older adults who performed high-intensity interval workouts saw greater improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness, muscle function, and memory, compared to those who did moderate-intensity exercise.
- Researchers and experts suggest more older adults add high-intensity exercise to their schedules, though it's important to speak to your doctor before starting any new exercise program.



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Previous research on [high-intensity interval training \(HIIT\)](#) shows ample benefits, but the majority of those studies were done on young adults, according to researchers who [recently assessed](#) whether the results applied to older people as well.

Now those researchers have confirmed that HIIT doesn't just improve physical health as we age—it confers improvements in mental function as well.

Published in *The Journals of Gerontology*, the study looked at 68 people between the ages of 66 and 79, who did not [exercise](#) regularly. Twice weekly for three months, half of them did moderate-intensity continuous training on a [stationary bike](#), while the other half did sessions of six-second cycle sprints with a total training time of 20 minutes per [workout](#).

Although the continuous training group logged twice the amount of exercise time weekly, it was the high-intensity participants who saw more significant results through improved cardiorespiratory fitness, muscle function, and working [memory](#).

These results run counter to a prevailing belief among some fitness professionals—and among older adults—that [high-intensity exercise](#) is too risky because it may lead to greater [injuries](#), according to study co-author Erik Rosendahl, Ph.D., professor of physiotherapy at Umea University in Sweden.

“Everyone was assessed by a cardiologist before the start, and we developed a program where resistance and [cycling pace](#) were regulated, to reduce the chance of complications,” he told *Bicycling*. “It worked well, there were no serious issues and our attendance rate was high. That means this type of workout is easily modified for older adults.”

Because of the outcome, the researchers suggested that this type of protocol be more widely used for older adults as a way to maintain and improve cardiovascular, respiratory, and muscular function.

Although the recent study involved only [low-impact](#) cycling, previous research suggests combining [high-intensity workouts](#) with some [higher-impact exercise](#) weekly could be even more powerful for healthy aging, according to Belinda Beck, Ph.D., researcher at Griffith University in Australia, who also owns The Bone Clinic, a health service focusing on bone, muscle, and joint health.

In her research on older adults, particularly [postmenopausal women](#), Beck has found that impact training—[jumping rope](#), for example, or running—leads to considerable improvements in [bone density](#). There may also be indirect benefits, such as deeper [sleep](#), better mood, and more social time.

“Unfortunately, there’s still a tendency to act like older adults are fragile and need to be protected, so they reduce their activity levels or do only low-impact, gentle exercise,” Beck told *Bicycling*. “But the research shows the opposite should be true. Everyone needs [intensity](#) and impact in their workouts in a balance that makes sense for them, and older adults are no exception.”

Like any type of new exercise effort, be sure to speak with your health provider before starting, especially if you have a chronic condition, such as cardiovascular disease, that may be a factor in choosing your [workout intensity](#).

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Okay riders, hopefully last week you were able to read Part 2 of this three-part series titled *Cycling for Seniors*, which offered helpful tips for riding your bike. Although that concludes the series, since we covered high-intensity interval training (HIIT) this week, I will follow-up next week with a few of the best HIIT workouts to help you boost your fitness. Until then,

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl