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# News Release

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## **Aerobic exercise shown to have protective qualities against aging for Veterans**

Helping to foster the health and well-being of Veterans is the mission of the VA's Center for Visual and Neurocognitive Rehabilitation, and scientists like Dr. Keith McGregor are working hard to focus on that mission. We have all heard that exercise is good for you, but how does exercise specifically help aging Veterans? That is exactly what Dr. McGregor and other researchers at the Atlanta VA Medical Center are looking to find out.

Atlanta VA research studies are peering into the aging process and finding ways to combat some of its negative changes, especially in the brain. A study conducted by Dr. Keith McGregor, whose results were recently published in the journal *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*, showed that aerobic exercise has some protective benefits in the aging brains of older adults.

As we perform motor tasks, even simple ones such as pressing a button or grabbing an object, our brains are sending signals to our bodies to achieve the desired result. In younger adults, one side of the brain is briefly inhibited while the other side takes the lead. However, as we get older, this inhibition decreases and a person experiences a loss of agility and motor control. This makes simple everyday tasks frustrating and more difficult to perform.

By using hand function measurements and brain imaging devices, Dr. McGregor has shown that aerobic exercise protects against this loss of inhibition. Active older adults displayed similar patterns of inhibition as younger adults and had better fine motor hand function than sedentary older adults. Even at the age of 40, the benefits of exercise were noticeable.

Dr. McGregor continues to expand his research on exercise in aging with his focus on prevention of motor dysfunction. He is enthusiastic about the VA's sponsorship of exercise interventions for Veterans at risk for motor decline and hopes to extend his research program into a standardized care practice. "As researchers and clinicians, our job is to overcome the obstacle of inaccessibility of exercise programs to Veterans as part of preventative care. Our goal is to enhance the culture of care through increased awareness and approachability of these simple and cost effective programs."