

Exercising may be answer to healthier eyes

By Gretchen Reynolds, New York Times

Age-related vision loss is common and devastating. But new research suggests that physical activity might protect our eyes as we age.

There have been suggestions that exercise might reduce the risk of macular degeneration, which occurs when neurons in the central part of the retina deteriorate. The disease robs millions of older Americans of clear vision. A 2009 study of more than 40,000 middle-aged distance runners, for instance, found that those covering the most miles had the least likelihood of developing the disease. But the study did not compare runners to non-runners, limiting its usefulness. It also did not try to explain how exercise might affect the incidence of an eye disease.

So, more recently, researchers at Emory University in Atlanta and the Atlanta Veterans Administration Medical Center in Decatur, Ga., took up that question for a study published last month in the Journal of Neuroscience. Their interest was motivated in part by animal research at the V.A. medical center. That work had determined that exercise increases the levels of substances known as growth factors in the animals' bloodstream and brains. These growth factors, especially one called brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or B.D.N.F., are known to contribute to the health and well-being of neurons and consequently, it is thought, to improvements in brain health and cognition after regular exercise.

Read the whole story