

New Study Finds Adults Can Learn Like Children

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The adult brain may never be too old to learn new tricks, reports the site WebMD:

“A new study shows as little as two hours of ‘child-like’ learning may be enough to stimulate growth of gray matter in the brains of mature adults.

Researchers say the findings suggest that the adult brain’s ability to change—or ‘plasticity’ as it’s known in medical terms—occurs much faster than previously thought.

Prior studies have shown increases in gray matter in adults after weeks or months of training, but in this study researchers induced changes in less than two hours of training in which adults learned new, nonsensical names for colors.

‘This pattern of findings demonstrates that the anatomical structure of the adult human brain can change very quickly, specifically during the acquisition of new, named categories,’ write researcher Veronica Kwok of the University of Hong Kong and colleagues in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

In the study, researchers used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans to examine gray matter changes in the brains of 19 adults after using a training method used to stimulate rapid word learning, similar to flash cards.

Over the course of five sessions, totaling one hour and 48 minutes over three days, the participants used listening, naming, and matching tasks to learn artificial names for two shades of the color green and two shades of the color blue.

Brain scans taken before and after the training sessions showed the participants’ gray matter increased in areas of the brain associated with color vision and perception.” (Read more [here](#).)

I was curious about the “child-like” learning the report described, so I went to the [study](#) itself, which reads:

“We used an intensive training method to teach subjects to map new nonsense terms onto newly created color categories (two shades of blue and two shades of green). A similar training procedure was used by Markson and Bloom to simulate the ‘fast-mapping’ phenomenon, in which children (and adults) learn new word–object associations after just a few exposures.”

Fast-mapping occurs during that amazing period in toddlerhood when children are soaking up new words, learning them at a rate of up to twenty a day. Fascinating to think that the fast-mapping phenomenon could be produced in adults.

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