

Increase brain size

Scientists used to say it was impossible for the brain to regenerate. Then landmark discoveries by Fred Gage, Ph.D., at the Salk Institute for biological studies in California showed that thousands of neurons are born in the brain daily, primarily in the hippocampus, a learning and memory region. The process is called neurogenesis. Scientists now know that by encouraging the birth and survival of these neurons, you can increase the size and intellectual strength of your brain, making it more resistant to memory decline and dementia.

The hippocampus of old people with sharper memories was 20% larger than that of those with poor cognition, despite similar Alzheimer's pathology according to research at John Hopkins University. Researchers believe that larger neurons with more synapses sprang from thinking, reading and active mental and social life.

UCLA researchers agree that meditation may help "build a bigger brain." MRIs scans revealed that people who had meditated 10 to 90 min every day for 5 to 46 years had larger volumes of grey matter in certain regions of the brain related to memory and emotions than control subjects who did not meditate.

The differences in brain anatomy may help explain why people who consistently meditate have more positive emotions, retain emotional stability, and engage better in mindful behaviour (that is, are more focused).