70 is the new 60: Older people score better on memory and cognitive tests now than in 2001

Older people are maintaining their mental acuity longer than before, according to a study carried out by Bente Johnsen and her colleagues.

“It’s good news that not only people’s physical health has improved, but also their cognitive health. We’re doing a lot of things right as a society,” Johnsen says.

She is a doctor and research fellow at the University Hospital of North Norway.

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She and her colleagues have used data from approximately 9,500 people between the ages of 60 and 87.

The participants did cognitive tests in 2001, 2008, and 2015/2016. They were born between 1914 and 1956.

The researchers observed that participants who were born in later years performed as if they were ten years younger.

The 70-year-olds in 2016 did as well as 60-year-olds in 2001. On one of the word tests, the age difference improvement was as much as 20 years.

The researchers looked at links between lifestyle and cognitive abilities to identify the reasons for the improvements.

“The clear winner is education. It had the most impact. We have more education now than before,” says Johnsen.

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