Some people hit 80 years old while retaining exceptional memories. What goes on in these 'super-ager' brains?

When it comes to aging, we tend to assume that cognition gets worse as we get older. Our thoughts may slow down or become confused, or we may start to forget things, like the name of our high school English teacher or what we meant to buy at the grocery store.

But that's not the case for everyone.

For a little over a decade, scientists have been studying a subset of people they call “super-agers.” These individuals are age 80 and up, but they have the memory ability of a person 20 to 30 years younger.

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A paper published Monday in the *Journal of Neuroscience* helps shed light on what’s so special about the brains of super-agers. The biggest takeaway, in combination with a companion study that came out last year on the same group of individuals, is that their brains have less atrophy than their peers’ do.

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But overall, Dr. Strange said, there were a lot of similarities between the super-agers and the regular agers. “There are a lot of things that are not particularly striking about them,” he said. And, he added, “we see some surprising omissions, things that you would expect to be associated with super-agers that weren’t really there.” For example, there were no differences between the groups in terms of their diets, the amount of sleep they got, their professional backgrounds or their alcohol and tobacco use.

The behaviors of some of the Chicago super-agers were similarly a surprise. Some exercised regularly, but some never had; some stuck to a Mediterranean diet, others subsisted off TV dinners; and a few of them still smoked cigarettes. However, one consistency among the group was that they tended to have strong social relationships, Dr. Rogalski said.

*This is an excerpt. Read the original post here*