New research indicates that exercise is key to mental health for older adults who are striving to remain independent and active.

Older adults who walk or jog perform better on memory tasks than those who are more sedentary, according to researchers from Boston University. The research showed that older adults who took more steps per day had better memory performance, while no change was reported in the young adult group. Researchers concluded that the effects of physical activity extend to long-term memory.

“Americans are living longer more than ever before,” says Sue Durkin, geriatric advanced practice nurse at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, Ill. “This means that we need to take a more proactive role in our health, from eating nutritious meals and exercising regularly to stimulating our cognitive skills.

To maintain and improve cognitive skills in older adults, Durkin suggests engaging in interactive conversations, learning a new hobby or craft, playing games and solving puzzles.

It’s always easier to exercise with others. Some congregations have walking clubs or offer the use of the building for older adults to walk in during cold or rainy weather. Some hold Zumba or yoga classes or exercise to religious music. What can your congregation do to help your members stay active?

Prayer: Thank God for coffee!

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