

Good Conversation Can Boost Brain Power, Study Finds

Thinking skills seem to improve with friendly chats, but not from competitive discussions

WEDNESDAY, Nov. 3 (HealthDay News) -- Friendly discussions with other people can help you solve common life challenges, but conversations that are competitive in tone aren't helpful, finds a new study.

"This study shows that simply talking to other people, the way you do when you're making friends, can provide mental benefits," lead author Oscar Ybarra, a psychologist and researcher at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, said in a university news release.

In this study of 192 undergraduates, the researchers examined the effect that brief episodes of social contact had on a type of cognition called executive function, which includes working memory, self-monitoring, and the ability to suppress external and internal distractions. These mental processes are essential in dealing with day-to-day problems.

Engaging in a short, 10-minute conversation in which they got to know another person helped boost the participants' performance on a variety of cognitive tasks. But when the conversations had a competitive tone, the participants showed no improvement on the cognitive tasks.

The study will be published in an upcoming issue of the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

"We believe that performance boosts come about because some social interactions induce people to try to read others' minds and take their perspectives on things," Ybarra said. "And we also find that when we structure even competitive interactions to have an element of taking the other person's perspective, or trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes, there is a boost in executive functioning as a result."

The findings suggest that having a friendly talk with a colleague before a big test or presentation may prove beneficial, according to the researchers.

More information

The U.S. National Center for Learning Disabilities has more about [executive function](#).

-- Robert Preidt

SOURCE: University of Michigan, news release, Oct. 28, 2010

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