



Older people's brain does not always slow down with age

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Washington : Contrary to what many people think the brain functioning of elderly people does not always slow down with age and in certain situations they show similar response times as younger adults, researchers say.

Both children and the elderly have slower response times when they have to make quick decisions in some settings.

But recent research suggests that much of that slower response is a conscious choice to emphasize accuracy over speed.

In fact, healthy older people can be trained to respond faster in some decision-making tasks without hurting their accuracy – meaning their cognitive skills in this area are not so different from younger adults.

“Many people think that it is just natural for older people’s brains to slow down as they age, but we’re finding that isn’t always true,” said Roger Ratcliff, professor of psychology at Ohio State University and co-author of the study.

“At least in some situations, 70-year-olds may have response times similar to those of 25-year olds,” he explained.

Ratcliff and his colleagues have been studying cognitive processes and aging in their lab for about a decade. In the new study, they extended their work to children.

Ratcliff said their results in children are what most scientists would have expected: very young children have slower response times and poorer accuracy compared to adults, and these improve as the children mature.

But the more interesting finding is that older adults do not necessarily have slower brain processing than younger people, said Gail McKoon, professor of psychology at Ohio State and co-author of the studies. “Older people don’t want to make any errors at all, and that causes them to slow down. We found that it is difficult to get them out of the habit, but they can with practice,” McKoon said.