

Elderly people grow brain cells just like young: study

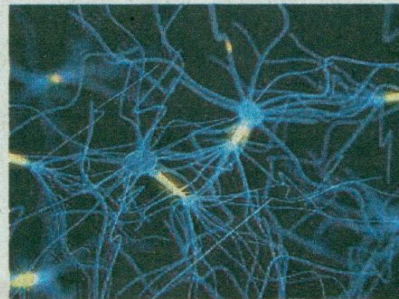
Older people too have the ability to make hippocampal neurons

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
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People as old as 79 may still generate new brain cells, U.S. researchers said on Thursday, stoking fresh debate among scientists over what happens to our brains when we age.

The report by scientists at Columbia University in New York, published in the journal *Cell Stem Cell*, runs directly counter to a study published in *Nature* last month which found no evidence of new neurons being created past the age of 13.

While neither study is seen as providing the definitive last word, the research is being closely watched as the world's population ages



The study focussed on the hippocampus, the brain's memory centre. ■ GETTY IMAGES

and scientists seek to better understand how the brain ages, for clues to ward off dementia.

The focal point of the research is the hippocampus, the brain's centre for learning and memory. Specifically, researchers are looking

for the foundations of new brain cells, including progenitor cells, or stem cells that would eventually become neurons.

Using autopsied brain samples from 28 people who died suddenly between the ages of 14-79, researchers looked at "newly formed neurons and the state of blood vessels within the entire human hippocampus soon after death," said the *Cell Stem Cell* study. "We found that older people have similar ability to make thousands of hippocampal new neurons from progenitor cells as younger people do," said Maura Boldrini, associate professor of neurobiology at Columbia University.