Brain-based findings of age-related changes in the interaction between attention control and emotion

When multiple stimuli are presented to one's visual field, they compete for information processing in a mutually inhibitory fashion. Attention can bias this competition in favor of one stimulus over another. Arousal appears to amplify the impact of attention on information processing. However, age-related brain changes appear to affect this interaction between arousal and attention. I will describe a series of findings from a multipart study that combined brain imaging measures in a group of younger (YA) and older adults (OA). The study evaluated whether threat-induced arousal during a spatial detection task differentially affected either the processing of target stimuli and/or the suppression of distractor stimuli in YA compared to OA. I will also discuss the potential role for exercise in mitigating age-related brain changes.

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