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STRATEGIC PROSPECTIVE MEMORY MONITORING IN OLDER ADULTS: THE TIME COURSE OF MONITORING DEACTIVATION AND REACTIVATION

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Strategic monitoring refers to using contextual information to increase attention in contexts in which targets are expected to appear (expected context) or decrease attention in contexts in which targets are not expected to occur (unexpected context). Prior research has shown that using a blocked procedure in which contexts changed every 10 trials, both younger and older adults could strategically monitor in response to simple (e.g., color) and complex (e.g., color and location) contextual cues. In younger adults, strategic monitoring was evidenced by a quick deactivation of monitoring in the first trial (i.e., faster responding) followed by a reactivation of monitoring across the last few trials (i.e., slower responding) in blocks with unexpected contexts. However, to date no research has examined the time course of strategic monitoring in older adults. In the present study, we therefore investigated older adults' ability to strategically monitor in response to complex (Experiment 1) and simple (Experiment 2) blocked contextual cues by examining the time course of monitoring deactivation (Experiment 1) and reactivation (Experiment 2). Experiment 1 showed that using a complex contextual cue, older adults could identify unexpected contexts and deactivate monitoring within the first trial, which is very similar to the time course found in previous research with younger adults. Experiment 2 replicated this pattern using a simple contextual cue. However, there was no evidence for reactivation of monitoring at the end of the block in preparation for the upcoming block with expected context. These findings suggested that strategic inhibitory (deactivation) processes generally remain intact with increased age whereas strategic preparatory (reactivation) processes may not.