

Take Care of Your Brain and it Will Take Care of You!

Diet and exercise. We hear these words all the time. Eat healthy, eat more fiber, eat less fat, stay hydrated by drinking eight glasses of water a day, and eat more fruits and vegetables rich in vitamins and antioxidants. Then there's the exercise aspect. Walk 10,000 steps a day, park farther away from the store, take the stairs instead of the elevator, stretch, bend, exercise! We do all these things to keep our body in shape and healthy, but we tend to forget one of the most important parts of our body... our brain.

The brain is the control center of our body, and as we age, slow down, and wrinkle, so does our brain. The brain actually shrinks with age, neural connections slow down, and fewer nerve cells are created, which results in memory loss.

What can we do to reduce the effects of age on our brain? Just like with the rest of our body, it falls back to diet and exercise.

Food for Thought

There's no magical supplement or vitamin to help protect against memory loss, but by paying attention to what you put into your body, you can sharpen your focus and concentration, enhance memory, attention span, and brain function. You can also increase your chances of maintaining a healthy brain by adding "smart" foods to your diet.

Top 10 Brain Foods

1. Blueberries
2. Salmon
3. Flax Seeds
4. Coffee
5. Mixed Nuts
6. Avocados
7. Eggs
8. Whole Grains
9. Chocolate
10. Broccoli

No Pain, No Brain

Did you know that exercising is one of the most frequently cited activities to improve age-related memory? Older people who exercise moderately a couple of times a week with activities such as walking, can boost brainpower. Walking increases blood circulation, oxygen, and glucose that reach the brain. Movement also increases breathing and heart rate so more blood flows to the brain, enhancing energy production. When you walk, you successfully oxygenate your brain, which in a way can "clear your head" and help you think better. Exercise can also help reduce a couple of key drainers of brain energy such as stress and loss of sleep by keeping the blood flowing to all parts of your body.

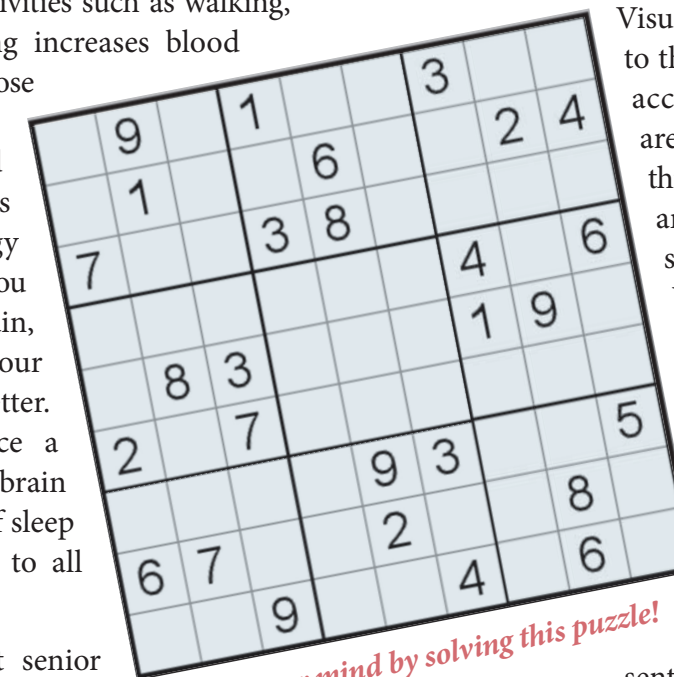
Studies have also proven that senior citizens, who walk on a regular basis for about 20 minutes a day, have shown improvements in memory skills, learning ability, concentration, and abstract reading.¹

Use It or Lose It

What else can you do to keep your brain in shape? Challenge your brain regularly to keep it sharp. You can challenge your brain with mental exercises, such as exercising your perceptive abilities, exercising your visuospatial abilities, exercising your structuralization abilities, exercising your logic, and exercising your verbal abilities.

Exercise your perceptive abilities by observing an object and drawing it immediately by memory. By the end of the week, redraw the seven objects you observed throughout the week. When eating a meal, try identifying all of the smells/tastes in the meal. Try memorizing lists of your favorite items, such as meals and prices on your favorite restaurant menu.

Finally, when speaking with someone on the phone, try recognizing the caller's voice before they identify themselves, or practice memorizing phone numbers.



Visuospatial abilities are related to the ability to make quick and accurate estimates of distance, areas, and volumes. To exercise this, try observing the thickness and length of objects you use, such as pens, car keys, etc. When you visit a destination and return home, try drawing a plan or map of the place you visited.

To exercise your structuralization ability, try taking a sentence in a book and rework the words to make another

sentence. You could also try to complete a jigsaw puzzle as quickly as possible. Keep doing this week after week until your time decreases.

The next time you go grocery shopping, try not to use a list. Create a system that helps you memorize what is on your list such as using memory aids, rhyming words, or classifying the food in different groups. This exercise will work your logic abilities. Another exercise is to utilize logical games, such as crossword puzzles, Sudoku, checkers, anagrams, and other word or number games.

Exercise your verbal abilities by watching or listening to the news on a daily basis. Then, throughout the day, write down points of the news you remember. Whenever you meet somebody new, or visit a new place, try to come up with an anagram of the name. Finally, do a mental book report after finishing each chapter by summarizing that chapter as briefly and thoroughly as possible.

Follow these simple steps to take care of your brain and it will take care of you! ☀

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¹ Annals of Behavioral of Medicine, August 2001