

Live a Brain Healthy Lifestyle

Today there is very little information, available about how to keep the brain healthy compared to the amount of information about maintaining a healthy body and heart. Recent, research shows us more and more that in order to reduce the risks of a dementia we need to take care of our body from birth. The experts are convinced that by engaging in active learning throughout life will help maintain brain health in our later years.

This can be done very simply by educating everyone on how to improve brain health through simple lifestyle changes such as;

- Exercising and challenging your brain, don't be a couch potato.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Make safety a priority; wear a helmet when riding a bike or roller blading.
- Learn to manage your stress and anxiety.
- Get a good night sleep.
- Make sure that you have regular check-ups for cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes.
- Do not smoke or use illegal drugs.
- Eat a heart healthy diet.
- Continue learning new things.

Research is showing that it may be beneficial for our brain if we lower our *stress levels, keep learning new things, exercise and watch what we eat.*



Exercise your Brain

Lawrence Katz, PhD, a Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives member at Duke University Medical Center believes that we settle into routines, which we repeat automatically everyday, so the brain activity decreases. Just by approaching our regular routine in a new way you can activate different parts of the brain that you were not using before. Try taking a different route when you are driving or walking to work. Try finding your keys or coins by touch, instead of by sight. You will be able to do this and do it quite easily if you focus your brain's attention on what you are doing at the time that you are doing it. The key to successful aging is to have a lifestyle that includes mental stimulation especially social interaction. Your brain requires continuous learning through out our lifetime. It requires change and that change requires that you learn new skills, new hobbies any activities that will require the brain to remodel itself. You can make your brain work better by learning new things that will build more networks of connections in your brain. Challenging your brain does not have to be difficult. It can be as simple as dialing the phone with your less dominant hand or as complex as learning a different language.

Also try to:

Avoid using calculators, do the numbers in your head.

Swap the TV for a mind game or try reading a book.

Take up a new hobby, study a new language or learn to play a musical instrument.

Play games that involve thinking and memory.

Read aloud to a child.

Do crossword puzzles, word searches and jigsaw puzzles.

Volunteer

Read a book and discuss it with a friend.

Attend cultural activities like going to a play, concert or visiting an art display.

Interact and socialize with others.

Here is a web site to visit;

<http://www.braingle.com/mind/index.php>

Making Lifestyle Changes

Eat a Healthier Diet to Nourish your Brain

Making healthy food choices not only improves your general health, but it is also beneficial for your brain health.

Go lean on protein by choosing low fat or lean meats and poultry. Try eating cold-water fish rich in Omega-3 oils such as trout and salmon at least 1-2 times per week this will provide your body and brain with a great source of protein. Another source of protein is beans, peas, nuts and seeds. Try to eat at least 4-5 servings of fruit or vegetables everyday. Eat a variety of fruit including fresh, canned or dried. Limit the amount of fruit juices you drink due to the sugar content.

Drink 8 glasses of water daily.

Enjoy alcohol and caffeine in moderation.

Eat at least 3 ounces of whole grain everyday including, bread, cereal, crackers, rice or pasta everyday. It is important to get your calcium rich foods everyday but try using low fat or fat free they are better for you.

A good rule to follow is to eat a rainbow of colors on your plate.

Blue and purple fruits and vegetables tend to be packed with anti-oxidants. Blackberries, blueberries, purple cabbage and plums are good choices.

Go green everyday with fruit and vegetables. These are good for your brain and benefit your bones. These options include avocados, broccoli, celery, cucumbers, peas, spinach, pears, and honeydew melon.

Choose white, tan, and brown fruits, like bananas, cauliflower, potatoes, turnips, onions and garlic.

Add sunshine to your plate with yellow and orange fruits and vegetables such as grapefruit, butternut squash, oranges, peaches, sweet potatoes lemons and yellow peppers.

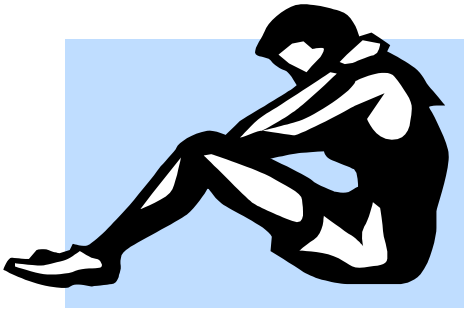
Eat red fruits and vegetables everyday. Beets, apples, red grapes, watermelon, rhubarb, and cherries are a few to try.

When it comes to food and brain health the reality is that we all could probably make some healthier choices when it comes to our diets. Try setting reasonable goals and be patient with your self, and you will be well on your way to increasing your brain fitness.

A good rule to remember that what is good for the body is usually good for the brain.

This is a helpful website to browse

<http://www.mypyramid.gov/>



Enjoy Physical Activity

Exercise daily if possible. The American Heart Association suggests that we exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week.

Research is showing that moderate physical activity promotes brain health. Those people who exercise regularly are less likely to develop heart disease, stroke and diabetes that are conditions that are associated with an increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Moderate exercise increases the circulation of blood to the brain, which nourishes the cells with nutrients and oxygen. You may find it easier to exercise and stick to it if you exercise in the evening after a stressful day. Plan to exercise with another person so that you are more likely to keep active and you will so be able to gain brain healthy benefits of social interaction too. Start by choosing an activity that you enjoy and set reachable goals.

Try using the stairs instead of using the elevator and try parking your car farther from the building to encourage more exercise. A reminder that everyone's health situation is different so you should always consult with your doctor first when beginning a new program.

Websites of possible exercise programs to look at;

<http://www.niapublications.org/exercisebook/ExerciseGuideComplete.pdf>

<http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/seniors/staying/754.html>

<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/exercise/toc.html>





Manage and Control Stress

There is increasing evidence that chronic stress can actually wear away at brain performance and overall memory. It is important to identify and try to lessen the things that are causing stress. Experiencing stress is a part of everyday life, however if symptoms of stress persist it can be very harmful for your body. Types and signs of chronic stress are:

- **Emotional:** depression, tension, anxiety, anger worry and fear.
- **Physical:** headaches, fatigue, insomnia and sweating.
- **Mental:** poor concentration, memory loss, and confusion.
- **Behavioral:** fidgeting, overeating, and over use of alcohol.

We cannot entirely eliminate stress from our lives but we can do things to minimize it to improve memory and brain health. See the suggestions below;

Try to eat regular healthy meals and get enough sleep.

Recognize that there are some things that you cannot control, and focus your attention on the things you can.

Try practicing relaxation strategies such as deep breathing, meditating or visual imagery for a calm peaceful space. Look in your community for Tai Chi or Yoga class at a local YMCA or a health club.

Try to balance your work and leisure. When you are at work take several breaks throughout your day to stand up and stretch, if possible go outside for a walk on your lunch hour.

Take time with a friend or spouse to share a joke or funny story and just laugh.

A simple thing as preparing things ahead of time whenever possible, instead of rushing to get out the front door everyday will lower your stress level.

Carve out time, even if it is only 15 minutes per day, and do an activity that you enjoy. Take time for yourself because it is essential to your overall health and well being.

Below are a few websites for you to browse.

<http://www.immrama.org/insighttips.html>

<http://www.revolutionhealth.com/healthy-living/relationships/stress/relaxation/breathing-exercises>

http://www.psybersquare.com/anxiety/panic_relax_II.html

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_05.htm

http://www.womensheartfoundation.org/content/Exercise/relaxation_and_deep_breathing_ex.asp

<http://www.yogajournal.com/basics/1468>

<http://www.smartbodyz.com/Meditation-Relaxation-Breathing-Exercises-Focus-Om.htm>

http://stress.about.com/od/breathingexercises/ht/breathing_ex.htm

<http://stress.about.com/od/stresshealth/a/laughter.htm>

<http://stress.about.com/od/generaltechniques/tp/topensionacts.htm>



*“Like a welcome
summer rain, humor may
suddenly cleanse and cool the
earth, the air, and you”*

Langston Hughes