



OPTIMISM

Think about this: when we have a negative thought (“I’m going to get yelled at by the boss”), that is all we can think about. When we have positive thoughts (joy, contentment, love), our minds tend to open to many possibilities. Taking an optimistic approach can become a habit, or way of life, that frees our brain to perform its best. A study of 678 nuns over the course of their lives revealed that the ones who described their lives more positively and in greater detail tended to live longer and had fewer instances of dementia.



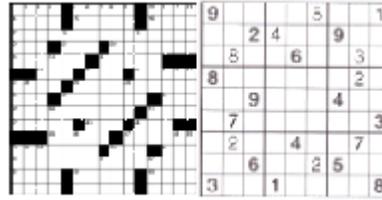
FIND A PURPOSE

Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl said, “He who has a *why* to live can deal with almost any *how*.” Research indicates that elderly people who scored high on purpose-in-life tests had a lower incidence of cognitive impairment and Alzheimer’s Disease. Our purpose need not be grandiose; sometimes mentoring grandchildren or looking out for a frail neighbor can provide great meaning in life!



SOCIALIZE

A five-year study showed that persons who were more socially active showed less cognitive decline than those who were not. Maintaining social ties and being involved in social activities keeps the brain stimulated. Retirement can open the door to opportunities for volunteering, taking a class, or joining a civic organization or church group.



USE YOUR BRAIN

Keeping your brain busy later in life has been associated with less cognitive decline. Reading, doing word puzzles, going back to school—at any age—are ways that we can “exercise” the brain. Remember the old adage, “If you don’t use it, you lose it!”



TEETH

Believe it or not, flossing your teeth can have a very beneficial effect on your overall health and in particular, your brain. Bacterial growth in the mouth can lead to inflammation and infection, which can easily spread to the heart, lungs, and brain. Flossing helps remove those bacteria and thus decreases the risk of spreading infections. Some researchers believe that inflammation due to gum disease may contribute to the development of Alzheimer’s Dementia!



IN CLOSING

Our brain is the “captain of the ship,” so as we navigate the seas of life, let’s do our best to take good care of it!



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Brain Health Tips



One thing all the amazing inventions and discoveries in history have in common is the human brain. It makes us uniquely different from all other creatures because it allows us to imagine, create, solve problems and make choices. Our brain is what lets us experience the fullness of life on this planet. It only makes sense that we should take care of it. Here are some tips and ideas that can help us keep our brains healthy and maximize our potential!



EXERCISE

Regular exercise improves blood flow to the brain and facilitates the removal of waste products. It releases proteins which protect nerves and actually causes nerve cells to multiply. In a 2010 study, exercising monkeys learned new tasks twice as quickly as non-exercising monkeys! Another study showed that, according to MRI scans, people who walked briskly for 45 minutes 3 times a week actually *increased* their brain volume over the course of just one year.



NUTRITION

Research suggests that people who follow a Mediterranean diet are less likely to develop dementia than the general population. The diet consists of plenty of fruits, vegetables (both high in antioxidants), and legumes, high amounts of olive oil (high in omega-3 fatty acids), moderate amounts of fish and eggs, moderate amounts of low-fat dairy, and little to no sugar, processed carbohydrates, or red meat. Coconut oil, which contains medium chain triglycerides, may provide an energy source for the brain and is believed to be beneficial in controlling blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and boosting thyroid function.



WATER

Your brain is over 80% water, so it only makes sense to stay adequately hydrated. Even being *slightly* dehydrated can impair thinking and affect your mood. Experts say a good rule of thumb is to divide your bodyweight in half and drink that many ounces of water every day, so if you weigh 100 pounds, you should drink 50 ounces of water per day.



SLEEP

Adequate sleep is crucial not only for the body to regenerate, but also for the brain. Most adults should get between 6 and 8 hours of sleep each night. Inadequate sleep can impair memory and concentration, and can place you at risk for an accident--studies have indicated that driving drowsy is just as bad as driving drunk!



VITAMIN B-12

Two symptoms of B-12 deficiency are “brain fog” and memory problems. Many people either do not get enough in their diet or have a problem absorbing it. Beef, poultry, eggs and seafood are good sources of B-12. Ask your doctor about taking a B-12 supplement.



SUNSHINE

Sunshine triggers our bodies to produce vitamin D, which, research indicates, helps promote nerve growth in the brain and thereby aid in processing information and forming new memories. Unfortunately, in the northern climates we do not usually get adequate sun exposure (most experts recommend 15 minutes a day). Ask your doctor to check your vitamin D levels; he may prescribe a supplement.



CHILL OUT

Chronic stress and worry can cause an increase in certain chemicals and hormones like cortisol, which can, at high levels, impair memory (not to mention cause problems with just about every system in your body). Find healthy ways to manage stress; yoga, tai chi, and meditation are some examples.



LAUGHTER

Loma Linda University reports that a good belly-laughing session can have a significant impact on body chemistry, lowering cortisol levels which can damage neurons (see Chill Out, above), and boosting the immune system. Laughing is something we don't do often enough!