

How to Keep the Brain Healthy?

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Working the brain is one of the most important things we can do as people. As we age, our brains deteriorate and we lose the abilities that we once had. As people get older, the more brain function declines. But by challenging our brains regularly and keeping it healthy, we can preserve and enhance our brains' capabilities into a high age.

[The brain is composed of neurons, which are cells within the brain, and these cells produce chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters help relay messages between neurons. Neurotransmitters can control muscle movements, regulate emotions, certain reflexes, and even regulate sleep and body temperature. The receiving cell determines how the neurotransmitter works, so it is vital to keep our cells healthy and nourished.]

By stimulating the brain daily with mental exercises, the brain constantly processes new information (which increases blood flow through the brain), which is an important factor of a healthy brain. Crossword puzzles, Sudoku, puzzles, etc. are all fun, simple ways to keep the brain working. Mental exercises can range anywhere from learning a new language to implementing a "Word of the Day" into a conversa-

tion, as long as it takes a little cognitive thinking and keeps your mind active. Being open to new things is also a way to arouse the brain because it keeps your routine fresh, and will keep blood flowing to the brain.

Physical exercise is also an important aspect in maintaining a healthy brain since exercising increases circulation, and the brain needs blood. Mental exercises can also be implemented into many physical activities to keep the brain pumping as well. For example, by engaging in all 5 of your senses in different ways each day, your brain develops the ability to rely on something rather than just eyesight. Another way to challenge the brain in a meta-physical way is by varying your daily routine. By altering the order in which you complete tasks or by using your non-dominant hand to do your daily routine, your brain is stimulated and works harder to process what is going on (which is a helpful thing). But mental and physical exercises are not the only thing needed to preserve a healthy brain.

Along with exercises that keep the brain sharp, you also need to keep it nourished with a brain-healthy diet. By increasing water intake, restricting the number of calories consumed, and eating "brain food," the brain, along with the body, is healthier and can perform at a higher level. A brain-healthy diet consists of balanced foods containing protein, good fats, and carbohydrates along with foods high in antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids. With a well-nourished brain, its brain function is increased and performance is enhanced.

It is also important to keep your brain calm and well-rested. Stress has become an important part in all of our lives, and some stress is good for you, but too much of it has a negative effect on your brain. Excessive stress can make us feel older than we really are. Stress affects telomeres, strips of

DNA at the end of chromosomes, which protect and stabilize the chromosome ends. These key pieces (telomeres) of DNA are also involved with cell divisions throughout the body, until eventually there is nothing left, making cell divisions less reliable and increasing the risk of age-related disorders. By relieving stress, you can help improve your ability to cope, learn, and remember. Aside from stress, sleep is also important. When we are deprived of sleep, lose sleep, or do not sleep at regular times, our brain works poorly. Our brain chemicals become imbalanced, leading to higher Cortisol (stress hormone) and lower growth hormones (healing and repairing hormones). The purpose of sleep is for the body to relax totally, recuperate and regenerate damaged cells caused by stress and strain. Lack of sleep, especially in prolonged periods of times, is detrimental both to your physical and mental health. So it is in the best interest to get enough sleep and remain as stress-free as possible.

The brain is one of the most important organs in our body and it is essential to keep it healthy. Toning the brain through mental exercises is just as important as physical exercises. Eventually our brain function will decline, but with these techniques and tips brainpower can be retained. Like the saying "use it or lose it" – use your head, and your brain will be healthy for as long as you desire. By following these pointers, brain function can be preserved you may be as sharp as you were in your younger days.