



Eye on Wellness

Get Your Brain in the Fast Lane

Find out what mental stimulation and brain games can do for your memory and other cognitive functions.

To be able to read and understand an article in a magazine, write a note with a pen, recognize a friend in a crowded shop, remember the first and last name of your son's friend...The list is endless! All these activities and knowledge require your brain to be in good shape. The basis of a fit brain are mental capacities also known as cognitive functions. The main cognitive functions are: attention, memory, language, logical reasoning, and visual and spatial acuity.

What is good for your body is also good for your brain. For instance, a balanced diet is absolutely necessary for optimal brain functioning, as the brain requires glucose, vitamins, and unsaturated fatty acids. Regular exercise is necessary for blood flow that carries oxygen to the brain, and a good night's sleep enables you to learn new things and process daily tasks.

Tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption, and too much stress not only prevent our bodies from performing well, they also impair our brain functioning. When we take care of our bodies by eating well, getting enough sleep and exercise, and avoiding harmful behavior patterns, we also take care of our brains.

Brain games boost mental stimulation

When it comes to the brain, the one factor we often neglect is mental stimulation. We are creatures of habit and tend to engage in the same activities and behavior patterns. These routine activities do not stimulate or benefit the brain.

In fact, the brain "prefers" novelty and unexpected events. As humans, our cognitive functions thrive and improve when we're faced with new ideas, events, and challenges. When we mentally challenge ourselves on a regular basis, we can maintain good intellectual potential as well as reduce our risk for age-related memory loss.

How to Maintain Your Cognitive Functions

As we age, our ability to concentrate decreases, and we aren't able to execute standard mental operations as quickly as we did when we were younger. We may also have difficulty remembering recently acquired words.

Cognitive aging is usually attributed to the progressive loss of neurons (the cells that conduct nerve impulses), but neuron loss is less important than it was thought to be a few years ago. We're discovering that more important than the number of neurons is the intensity of their connections—intensity that can be strengthened through mental stimulation.

Decrease your risk of Alzheimer's

Recent scientific studies have shown that activities that require taking initiative and careful planning, like gardening and traveling, are associated with a decreased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Other studies have shown that it's better for the mind to engage in manual activities, such as do-it-yourself projects, painting, gardening, playing an instrument, and participating in sports, than it is to watch television, attend meetings, and listen passively to conversations.

To maintain sharp cognitive skills, it is necessary to vary your intellectual activities on a regular basis.

Here are some practical tips that will help you acquire good habits for maintaining your cognitive capacities on a daily basis—without a lot of effort.

- ⌘ Practice the art of focusing
- ⌘ Mentally repeat the information you want to memorize
- ⌘ Think about the information you want to memorize
- ⌘ Sum up the information
- ⌘ Organize the information you want to learn
- ⌘ Create acronyms
- ⌘ Turn routine tasks into rituals
- ⌘ Use spatial and temporal landmarks when retrieving information
- ⌘ Create associations





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Coping with arthritis at work.

Whether you work at a desk or on an assembly line, the pain and stiff joints of arthritis can make your job difficult. Increase your comfort—and your productivity—with these tips for arthritis pain relief.



- ◆ **Prioritize.** Write a to-do list, then tackle the most important items at the beginning of the day when you have the most strength and energy.
- ◆ **Mix it up.** Rotate between different activities throughout the day to avoid repetitive motions or staying in one position too long.
- ◆ **Organize your work space.** Arrange your work space so that you have to do minimal reaching, lifting or carrying.
- ◆ **Think about your posture.** When typing, for instance, hold your arms comfortably at your sides with your elbows at a 90-degree angle.
- ◆ **Take frequent short breaks.** Use one- or two-minute breaks to stretch or practice deep breathing.
- ◆ **Support your wrists.** Rest your hands on a wrist rest or padded bar—placed between your keyboard and your lap—when typing.
- ◆ **Use headphones.** Wear headphones when talking on the phone—especially if you type, file or write while on the phone.
- ◆ **Carry correctly.** When lifting or carrying items, hold them close to your body in your palms or on your arms, which is easier on your joints.
- ◆ **Use special tools,** modified equipment and assistive devices to make your job easier. Ergonomic chairs, electric staplers and enlarged pen grips, for instance, may be helpful.

Stand up for your feet

To keep your feet healthy, heed these tips from the foot doctors (podiatrists) of the **American Podiatric Medical Association**

- If your feet persistently hurt, see your doctor or a podiatrist. Foot pain isn't normal.
- Check your feet regularly for problems, such as swelling, cuts, peeling, growths or discolored nails.
- Wash your feet regularly, especially between your toes, and dry them completely.
- Keep your toenails trimmed straight across, but not too short.
- Make sure your shoes fit well and are in good condition.
- Wear the right type of shoe for each activity, such as running shoes for running.
- Avoid wearing the same shoes every day.
- If you have diabetes or circulation problems, see a podiatrist at least once a



Information obtained from Mayo Clinic Embody Health