

LIFESTYLE FOR A

healthy mind

2022 Week Five

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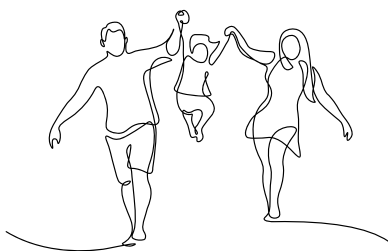
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Make Your Brain More Flexible

Just like stretching benefits your body, stretching your brain helps you develop a more agile mind. An abundance of research suggests that certain types of activities are beneficial for your brain's health. Let's take a look at some of these.

Take care of your body. Research confirms that people who take care of their bodies are less susceptible to the cognitive declines connected with the aging process. Engaging in healthy behaviors can reduce your chances of developing cognitive impairment and dementia as you age by as much as 60%. Those healthy behaviors include not smoking, exercising regularly, eating lots of fruits and vegetables, consuming low amounts of alcohol, and maintaining a healthy weight.

Learn something new. This will help keep your brain on its toes, and it offers new challenges. Researchers have determined that those who learn a new skill will likely experience improvement on memory tests. Some things to try might include learning a new language, engaging in a new hobby, learning how to play a musical instrument, or learning a new sport.

Draw a map of your town from memory. Do you think you could navigate the streets of your neighborhood with your eyes closed? Challenge your brain and actually draw a map of your town or neighborhood. Include major streets, major side streets, and local landmarks. After you finish, compare your memory map to a real map of the area. How did you do? Did you miss some things? By forcing yourself to remember things that seem so familiar, it helps activate a variety of areas of your brain.

Try to use your non-dominant hand. This could help keep your brain alive because it can be so challenging. Try switching hands when you eat dinner or when you write something. It will be difficult, but that is precisely the point. Activities that are not easy can be the most effective ones for your brain.

Socialize. This can be good for you because it tends to engage multiple areas of the brain. In addition, many social activities incorporate physical elements, like playing a sport, and this is beneficial to the brain as well. To increase the load on your brain, develop friendships with people of different ages, races, and ethnic backgrounds. This can challenge your brain to build new connections as you process differences in speech, tone, and the latest cultural lingo.

Even if you are an introvert, engaging in social activities can be beneficial in the short and long term. Ideas to stay socially engaged include volunteering, joining a club or community organization, participating in a local walking group, and more.

Meditate. This has been used for thousands of years and recently gained recognition for its effectiveness. Your brain needs time to restore itself and reflect. This practice of “thinking about not thinking” is linked to a host of physical and mental health benefits, including enhancing your memory. Meditation can help improve focus, attention, empathy, and even immunity. Some studies show that it can increase the capacity of working memory and increase mental flexibility.

Mindfulness meditation, in particular, is linked to both mental and physical health benefits such as reduced stress, lower heart rate, improved immunity, and better sleep. Learn more about mindfulness meditation at www.verywellmind.com/mindfulness-meditation-88369

In summary, perhaps the easiest way to keep your mind sharp as you age is to develop a meaningful life that includes a healthy lifestyle, work that motivates you, and having a sense of purpose. All of these, working together, can help safeguard your brain.



Get Loose

Flexibility, like muscle strength, decreases with age. The good news is no matter your age you can always improve flexibility. Stretching can help normal activities of daily living become easier. By improving your flexibility, you could reach items on a high shelf more easily or getting up and down from the floor could become easier.

Flexibility relates to the range of motion of a joint, including how far it can be bent and how far the joint can be stretched. This range will be different for all joints. Many people will experience limited or reduced range of motion at some point in their lives as a result of an injury, infection, swelling, inflammation, or disease (such as arthritis).

Doing stretching exercises can help loosen tight muscles. As a reminder, stretches should be held for a minimum of 15 seconds (no bouncing), repeated at least twice, and should be done only when your muscles are warmed up. Stretching should not cause pain, but you should feel a slight pull and only slight discomfort. Remember to relax and breathe while you are stretching and do not hold your breath. Stretch both sides of your body equally.

MIND Diet Recommendations

The MIND diet was introduced in the first newsletter. As a recap, the MIND diet is a hybrid of the Mediterranean and DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diets. While both diets have been found to reduce the risk of cardiovascular conditions, the MIND diet has been shown to reduce risks of Alzheimer’s and dementia. Even if you follow the MIND diet moderately, research shows you can still reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer’s.

Here are the 15 dietary components, including 10 “brain-healthy food groups” of the MIND diet, and the recommended amounts you should eat of each one.

Green leafy vegetables. Enjoy these every day or at least six servings per week. A serving is 1 cup cooked or 2 cups raw, such as spinach, kale, cooked greens, broccoli, and dark green lettuces.

Other vegetables. Have at least one serving/day and more is better. The serving size is ½ cup and examples include asparagus, carrots, bell peppers, mushrooms, onions, eggplant, green beans, and more.

Nuts. The serving size is 1 ounce. Have a serving of nuts every day or at least five times/week.

Berries. Eat these at least two times/week. One serving of berries is ½ cup. Enjoy blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, and cherries.

Beans and lentils. Have these at least three times/week. A serving is ½ cup and includes beans, such as black, pinto, kidney, garbanzo, lima and butter beans, peas, and all types of lentils.

Whole grains. Have at least three servings per day, with one serving being ½ cup cooked grains or 1 slice. Examples include oatmeal, quinoa, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, 100% whole-wheat bread.

Fish. Have at least one 3- to 5-ounce serving/week. Enjoy salmon, sardines, trout, tuna, tilapia, cod, mahi mahi, and halibut.

Poultry. Have at least two servings/week of white/skinless chicken or turkey.

Olive oil. Use this as the main oil, having two servings/day. Serving size = 1 teaspoon.

Wine. No more than one serving per day. Serving size is 5 ounces. (Note: Drinking less is better for health than drinking more. If you don't currently consume alcohol there is no need to start.)

Here are foods that you should limit consumption of:

Red meats. Have no more than three servings/week. One serving is 3 to 5 ounces and includes beef, pork, lamb, ham, hot dogs, sausages, bacon, and salami.

Butter and margarine. Have less than 1 tablespoon/day

Cheese. Less than 1 ounce/week.

Sweets and sweetened beverages. No more than 5 servings/week of highly processed foods, desserts, candies, ice-cream, cookies, cakes, donuts, soda, and more.

Fried and fast food. No more than one serving/meal per week.



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Fajita Casserole

Makes 4 Servings

Ingredients:

Nonstick cooking spray
1 tablespoon canola oil
1½ cups diced bell peppers, any color
½ cup diced onions, any color
¾ pound lean or extra lean ground beef
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon cumin
½ teaspoon smoked paprika
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
1½ cups cooked brown rice
½ cup green enchilada sauce
½ cup shredded Mexican-style cheese blend
¼ cup plain Greek yogurt
¼ cup fresh cilantro, leaves, chopped

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Preheat oven to 375° F. Coat a 2qt baking dish with cooking spray, set aside.
3. Rinse produce by gently rubbing under cold running water. Peel, core, and chop vegetables as directed above.
4. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and bell peppers and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes until soft.
5. Add the ground beef and sauté for 6 to 8 minutes, breaking it into small pieces with a wooden spoon, until the beef is browned. Add the garlic and sauté 1 to 3 minutes more.
6. Stir in the chili powder, cumin, smoked paprika, salt, and black pepper. Add the rice and enchilada sauce and stir until combined.
7. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish and top with shredded cheese. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the cheese is bubbly and browned. Internal temperature should reach 165° F. Remove the casserole from the oven; serve hot with Greek yogurt and cilantro.

Nutrition Information per serving: 360 calories; 17g fat; 26g carbohydrates; 23g protein; 3g fiber; 560mg sodium; 3g sugar.

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