



Your Amazing Brain

Five Brain Fitness Tips

by Susan Grotenhuis

(NAPSA)—Here's an idea to think about: To stay mentally sharp, sustained effort is key. It takes work to keep a complicated organ such as your brain in optimum condition.

Fortunately, it doesn't have to be complicated. You can follow these five simple steps to keep your mind bright:

1. Change. By the time you reach retirement age, your brain has mastered many tasks. You have to think of creative ways to surprise it. So change is vital to brain health. Change your routines, change your environment, make new friends, have different conversations, listen to different music, try new foods. List the most familiar things in your life and then change them.

2. Think. Don't let your brain get bored. Stimulate it with lots of new, refreshing information. Read articles, visit museums, study a new topic or take up a new hobby. That awkward feeling you may remember from your first day on the job is what you want to replicate. Try learning a foreign language or a musical instrument.

3. Move. Experts agree that aerobic exercise has the greatest benefit in terms of helping your brain stay young. Encourage important blood flow to the brain by doing at least 2½ hours of moderate aerobic activity (brisk walking) each week. Start where you can and gradually build up from there. Setting small, monthly goals keeps your efforts focused and on track.

4. Eat smart. Keep those arteries—in your heart and your brain—from getting clogged with fat by eating plenty of fruits, veggies and whole grains. Stick with healthy fats such as those in nuts,



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At any age, you can follow several strategies to keep your brain healthy, such as aerobic exercise.

avocados and olive oil. Include plenty of lean protein and fiber to round things out. Try to fill half your plate at each meal with fruits and vegetables. They're full of anti-oxidants and supply important nutrients. Avoid white flour, generally found in breads and pastries. Losing any extra pounds can help, too. Maintaining a healthy weight means a better chance at a healthy brain.

5. Be happy. Human beings are social creatures. The brain is designed to interact with others and derives great benefit from close relationships. When you're happy, your brain is happy. When you're stressed or depressed, your brain releases a chemical called cortisol. Cortisol in small doses is useful for alertness and concentration. When it lingers, however, it attacks the cells in the hippocampus, where memories are formed. Getting plenty of sleep is also important for relaxing and renewing the mind.

• Ms. Grotenhuis is a certified Brain Fitness Facilitator with Asbury Communities, an aging services organization. For more information on Brain Fitness, visit www.Asbury.org/Perspective.