

Fill'Er Up!

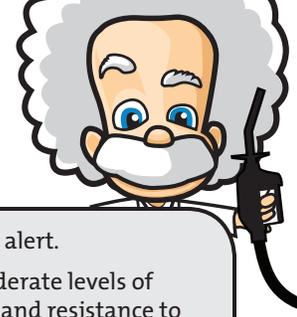


We've all experienced that moment when you walk into a room and can't remember why! Early research states as you get older, the speed of your brain begins to slow down and your memory sometimes "shorts out." Good news! That may not be completely true! Scientists now say that your brain is actually getting smarter as you age. There are more and more things you can do to invigorate your noggin and maintain healthy brain function.

The health of your brain, like the health of your body, depends on several factors. You may be surprised how making the smallest tweaks to your daily routine can boost your intellect, postpone mental aging and help you live a longer life.

6 Pillars of Brain Health

Integrating these six guidelines into your routine can help minimize harmful effects on your brain.



<p>Regular Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise stimulates your hippocampus, the part of your brain that strengthens your memory connections and creates more cells. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical activity reduces stress, boosts your mood and increases energy levels. Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise five times per week. Gardening, cleaning, even doing 	<p>laundry count as exercise. Just get moving!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include balance and coordination exercises. Try yoga, balance balls, tai chi or even choga (<i>chair yoga</i>). These types of exercise can help 	<p>you stay alert.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add moderate levels of weights and resistance to your workout. They can cut your risk of Alzheimer's disease in half!
<p>Mental Stimulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously learning new things and challenging your brain throughout your years will lessen your chances of developing Alzheimer's disease or dementia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discover something new: study a foreign language or learn an instrument. The bigger the challenge, the bigger the reward for your brain. Test your skills with strategy games like brain teasers, puzzles, riddles, crosswords, 	<p>or word or number games.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer. A Johns Hopkins study found older women who tutored children for six months developed stronger cognitive skills. The social and mental activity involved in teaching sends blood rushing 	<p>to the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which analyzes, plans and solves problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take the road less traveled: try a different route or eat with your non-dominant hand. Varying your regular habits creates new brain pathways.
<p>Sleep</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiet your inner chatter. If stress, anxiety or negative thoughts keep you awake at night, try getting out of bed and going into a different room to relax or read for about twenty minutes and 	<p>then get back into bed and try again.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a regular sleep schedule. Eight hours is recommended because your brain needs restful sleep in order to function at its full capacity. Sleep deprivation 	<p>impairs your ability to function at top speed the following day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During a deep sleep, your brain shuffles recently received data into storage, creating space for fresh information, which is critical for memory formation 	<p>and retention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a nightly ritual such as a hot bath, writing in a journal or dimming the lights. Establishing a habit will send your brain powerful signals that it's time for restorative sleep.
<p>Stress Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress takes a heavy toll on the brain, affecting nerve cell growth and increasing your risk for mental disease. Family and friends can quiet the intensity of stress 	<p>and the brain's chemical reactions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress alters your breathing, which increases your heart rate and affects the levels of oxygen in the brain. Take deep breaths to help calm down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make relaxation a priority in your busy life. Meditation, a bubble bath or a stroll in the park may help immunize your brain against the damaging effects of stress. When you're stressed, your body goes into a fight-or-flight 	<p>mode also known as general adaptation syndrome. During this reaction, your body produces the hormone cortisol and other chemicals that can kill neurons inside your brain and create various health problems.</p>
<p>Active Social Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies show people with larger social networks have a slower rate of memory decline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As humans, we are highly social creatures, yet as we grow older we tend to become more isolated. Surround yourself with people who care about you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit your local community center and sign up for group classes, join a club or volunteer. Technology makes it easy to connect with others via 	<p>e-mail or social media networks such as Facebook and Pinterest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make lunch plans or a movie date with friends.
<p>Brain Foods and a Healthy Diet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's important to maintain a healthy weight. Research 	<p>shows those extra pounds actually shrink your brain and the tissue that surrounds it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a heart-healthy 	<p>diet rich in fish, lean proteins, nuts, whole grains, omega 3 fats and fresh produce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eat fruits and vegetables 	<p>across the color spectrum to supply the antioxidants and vitamins needed to boost brain power and help protect against damage to cells.</p>

It's never too late to start boosting your brain power. Give your brain what it needs so its vital processes aren't disrupted. Talk with your doctor about setting up a balanced health and wellness plan to keep you and your noggin on the right track.

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