

Brain Fitness Activities and Tips

Brain Fitness Activities and Tips why they Work

1. Add some dark chocolate to your diet.

When you eat chocolate you activate the systems in your brain that pump dopamine, an important brain chemical. These systems enable learning and memory, and help keep your brain sharp and fit. Chocolate also offers flavanols, brain-boosting antioxidant compounds that are also found in red wine and berries. To get the maximum brain boost from chocolate, look for the darkest chocolate available, with the least added sugar or other ingredients.

2. Go on a guided tour of a museum or another site of interest. Pay very careful attention to what the tour guide says. When you get home, try to reconstruct the tour by writing an outline that includes everything you remember.

Research into brain plasticity (the ability of the brain to change at any age) indicates that memory activities that engage all levels of the brain operation-receiving, remembering and thinking-help to improve the function and hinder the rate of decline, of the brain.

3. Choose a song with lyrics that you enjoy but don't have memorized. As you listen to the song, try to hear each word so that you can write the lyrics down. Listen to the song as many times as necessary! Then learn to sing along with the song. Once you've mastered one song, move on to another!

Developing better habits of careful listening will help you in your understanding, thinking and remembering. Reconstructing the song requires close attentional focus and an active memory. When you focus, you release the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, a brain chemical that enables plasticity and vivifies memory.

4. Sit in a place outside your house, such as on a park bench or in a cafe. Stare straight ahead and don't move your eyes. Concentrate on everything

you can see without moving your eyes, including your peripheral vision. When you have finished, write a list of everything you saw. Then try again and see if you can add to your list!

Scientists have shown that the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, which is crucial to focus and memory, falls off with memory loss and is almost absent in Alzheimer's patients. This activity should help you reinvigorate the controlled release of acetylcholine in your brain through a useful visual memory task.

5. If you've ever thought about learning to play an instrument or take up an old one, now is a great time!

Playing an instrument helps you exercise many interrelated dimensions of brain function, including listening, control of refined movements, and translation of written notes (sight) to music (movement and sound).

6. Do a jigsaw puzzle that will be challenging for you—no fewer than 500 pieces.

Mundane as they may seem, jigsaw puzzles can provide real help for your brain. Completing one requires fine visual judgments about where pieces belong. It entails mentally "rotating" the pieces, manipulating them in your hands, and shifting your attention from the small piece to the "big picture." To top it off, it's rewarding to find the right pieces.

7. Set your television volume down a little from where you normally have it set. See if by concentrating you can follow just as successfully as when the volume was higher. As soon as that setting gets easy, turn it down another notch!

Think of this: You can't get rid of radio static by turning up the volume. Many people raise the volume because their listening has become "detuned" or a little fuzzy. Now that you've completed a listening training program, it's time to turn down the sound. Matching TV volume to a conversational level can help you catch every word when talking with others.

8. Reacquaint yourself with the ball. Practice throwing and catching a ball up in the air. You might even want to take up juggling. Doing so can hone your brain's visual, tactile and hand-eye coordination responses.

Scientists have recorded improvements in the functional brains of people who have mastered these kinds of sensory-guided movement skills. Practicing skills that make good, fast use of sensations from listening, vision and touch have widespread

positive impacts for an older brain.

9. Find an activity you can do by yourself-such as completing a crossword puzzle or playing solitaire-and take it to the next level. See if by concentrating, and giving more effort to the activity, you can succeed better or more quickly.

There is limited value in working at a game or exercise that you can play without paying close attention. It is important to always strive to "take it up a notch" to a higher and more demanding level, where you re-engage the brain's learning machinery.

10. If you're right-handed, use your left hand for daily activities (or vice-versa). Start with brushing your teeth left-handed, and practice until you have perfected it. Then try to build your way up to more complex tasks, such as eating.

This is an exercise in which you know what you're supposed to achieve but must do it in a new and demanding learning context. Doing such activity can drive your brain to make positive changes. Think of millions of neurons learning new tricks as you finally establish better control of that other hand!

11. Add fish—especially fatty fish like salmon—to your diet.

Studies suggest that a diet rich in fish can improve cognitive function. Cold-water fish, like sardines, anchovies, salmon, and trout are the most beneficial. It's important to avoid fish that are high in mercury, like sharks and swordfish, as that can be bad for the brain.

12. Brain health is another reason to get on your bicycle, to the swimming pool or wherever else you like to exercise your body.

New research indicates that exercise has positive benefits for the hippocampus, a brain structure that is important for learning and memory. It can even help your brain create new cells.

13. Take a walk on a cobblestone path.

Scientists believe that walking on uneven surfaces like cobblestones improves the vestibular system of the inner ear, which plays a central role in balance and equilibrium. Cobblestone walking challenges the vestibular system in ways that improve its function, which translates into better balance- the key to preventing serious injuries.

14. Get a good night's sleep. If you have trouble falling asleep, make sure your bedroom is quiet and dark, learn some deep relaxation techniques, and avoid alcohol and caffeine after 7 in the evening.

Scientists believe that our brains consolidate learning and memories during sleep. Studies have shown that people who don't sleep enough have more trouble learning new information while sleeping well after learning something new helps the brain effectively put that information into long-term memory.

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