

QuickTakes



LIFE-LONG MENTAL STIMULATION appears to protect against mental decline and Alzheimer's. Fortunately, you don't have to turn your life upside down, or make extreme changes to achieve many of the benefits.

Here are some tips to keep your brain active every day:

- Reduce your television watching by an hour a day or more.
- Learn a new language, take on volunteer work or cultivate a hobby that demands attention to detail.
- Solve number puzzles like Sudoku or play Scrabble or other "thinking" board games.
- Work on crossword puzzles.
- Play a musical instrument.
- Take a class, learn a new subject or learn new information about a subject you already know.

Keep Your Brain Fit with Physical Activity

We know that exercise is good for your body's fitness, but research indicates that it's good for brain fitness, too. Physical exercise is essential for maintaining good blood flow to the brain and encouraging new brain cells. It also reduces the risk of heart attack, stroke, and diabetes; thereby protecting against Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

Aerobic exercise benefits brain function by improving oxygen consumption. Recent research found that aerobic exercise reduced brain cell loss in elderly subjects. More-active people also score higher on perceived ability to perform activities of daily living, physical well-being and other measures related to quality of life. A few studies even suggest that more-active lifestyles may be linked with higher levels of alertness and mental ability, including the ability to learn.

Walking, bicycling, gardening, dancing, and other activities that get the body moving and the heart pumping will benefit your brain. Growing evidence shows that physical exercise does not have to be strenuous or even require a major time commitment. Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity each day, working up to a total of 2 hours and 30 minutes each week.

Start Slowly

If you have not been active for a while, start out slowly, aiming for 10 minutes at a time. After several weeks or months, build up your activities—do them longer and more often. There are many ways to build the right amount of activity into your life. Every little bit adds up and doing something is better than doing nothing.

- Pick an activity you like and one that fits into your life.
- Find the time that works best for you.
- Be active with friends and family. Having a support network can help you keep up with your program.

Stay Safe

Physical activity is generally safe for everyone. People who are physically fit have less chance of injury than those who are not fit. The health benefits you gain from being active are far greater than the chances of getting hurt. Being inactive is definitely not good for your health.

Here are some things you can do to stay safe while you are active:

- If you haven't been active in a while, start slowly and build up.
- Learn about the types and amounts of activity that are right for you.
- Choose activities that are appropriate for your fitness level.
- Build up the time you spend before switching to activities that take more effort.
- Use the right safety gear and sports equipment.
- Choose a safe place to do your activity.
- See a health care provider if you have a health problem.

Double the Benefit

Physical activities that also involve mental activity such as plotting your route, observing traffic signals and making choices provide additional value for brain health. Furthermore, doing these activities with a companion offers the added benefit of social interaction, which has been linked to mental vitality. For even more benefit, try combining social engagements with physical activity and a healthy diet. Research shows the combination of these behaviors lowers the risk for mental decline even greater.

Adopt a Brain-Healthy Diet

According to current research, a brain-healthy diet is one that reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes, encourages good blood flow to the brain, and is low in fat and cholesterol. A diet such as this is not only brain-healthy, but is weight- and heart-friendly as well. Like the heart, the brain needs the right balance of nutrients, including protein and sugar, to function well. A brain-healthy diet in combination with physical and mental activity is most effective.

1. INCREASE YOUR INTAKE OF PROTECTIVE FOODS.

Current research suggests that certain foods may reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, and appear to protect brain cells.

- In general, dark-skinned fruits and vegetables have the highest levels of naturally occurring antioxidant levels. Examples include kale, spinach, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, beets, red peppers, corn and eggplant. Fruits with high antioxidant levels include blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, plums, oranges, red grapes, cherries and pomegranates
- The old wives' tale that fish is good for the brain appears to be true. A 2006 report found that elderly people who ate fish at least once a week did better on memory and acuity tests than their peers who did not eat fish. Try to eat seafood twice a week. But stay away from fried seafood and fish with high levels of mercury such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish.

- Some nuts can be a useful part of your diet. Almonds, pecans and walnuts are a good source of the antioxidant vitamin E.

2. REDUCE YOUR INTAKE OF FOODS HIGH IN FAT AND CHOLESTEROL. A high intake of saturated fat and cholesterol clogs the arteries and is associated with higher risk for Alzheimer's disease. However, HDL (or "good") cholesterol may help protect brain cells. Use mono- and polyunsaturated fats, such as olive oil, for example. Try baking or grilling food instead of frying.

3. EAT AMPLE SERVINGS OF LEAFY VEGETABLES AND BEANS. Replace sugary and low-fiber starchy foods with whole fruits and whole grains. These steps will help lower your risk of developing diabetes, a disease that almost doubles the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

4. MANAGE YOUR BODY WEIGHT for overall good health of brain and body. A long-term study of 1,500 adults found that those who were obese in middle age were twice as likely to develop dementia in later life. Those who also had high cholesterol and high blood pressure had six times the risk of dementia. Adopt an overall healthy food lifestyle, rather than a short-term diet, and eat in moderation.

Source: Alzheimer's Association

Summer Pizza

Takes 30-60 minutes

Makes one 13-inch pizza, for 4 servings (8 slices)

The vegetable topping is generous and makes this an eat-from-the-pan pizza. Or, make two smaller pizzas. Look for pre-mixed pizza dough in the refrigerator case at your supermarket. You can also use a frozen pizza crust.

INGREDIENTS:

Cornmeal, for sprinkling
1 pound pizza dough, preferably whole-wheat
Olive oil cooking spray
¾ cup tomato sauce
1/2 cup roasted peppers from a jar, diced
½ cup chopped fresh basil, divided
¼ cup grated part-skim mozzarella
2 tablespoons crumbled feta
1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium zucchini, thinly sliced
½ cup minced red onion
Freshly ground black pepper

PREPARATION:

1. Set oven rack on lowest position. If you have a pizza stone, place the stone on the rack. Preheat oven to 500°F or the highest setting. Sprinkle a pizza pan or baking sheet with cornmeal.
2. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to a 13-inch circle. Transfer the dough to the pizza pan or baking sheet. Lightly spray the dough with cooking spray. Spread tomato sauce over the dough.
3. In a medium bowl, stir together roasted peppers and half of the basil. Sprinkle over the pizza. Sprinkle with mozzarella and feta. In the same bowl, stir together olive oil, zucchini and onion. Arrange the zucchini on top of the cheese and sprinkle with any onion remaining in the bowl.
4. Bake the pizza until the crust is golden, 12 to 15 minutes. Sprinkle with the remaining basil and a generous grinding of black pepper. Serve hot.



Source: Healthy Living Kitchens

NUTRITIONAL INFO PER SERVING

268 Calories
3.8g Fat
1.4g Saturated fat
12g Protein
48g Carbohydrate
6.8g Fiber
862mg Sodium