



BOOST YOUR BRAIN POWER

How to improve mental dexterity and brain fitness

By *Emily Leinfuss*

Some of the smartest, most up-to-date guidance for nurturing healthy brain function is kind of a no-brainer. “It turns out your mother was right. Eat your vegetables and fruits, get regular exercise and do crossword puzzles,” says neuroscientist Paula Bickford, PhD. Bickford is a professor at USF’s Department of Neurosurgery, Center of Excellence for Aging and Brain Repair. (<http://health.usf.edu/medicine/neurosurgery/ceabr/>).

The Center of Excellence’s main purpose is to research how the brain changes with aging, especially in relation to memory. “As we get older, the brain loses some function. But there are stem cells in the hippocampus that can make new brain cells.” This is called neurogenesis, explains Bickford and, while it slows down with age, it can be ‘revved’ up.

“One of the things we study is the ability to have new neurogenesis. That function doesn’t exactly replace cells that died, but it helps create a situation where the brain is healing itself. This is an important part of cognitive, memory function and of the repair of tissues following injuries, stroke, head injury or traumatic injury,” she adds.

Experts agree that nurturing brain healing requires creating an optimal environment in the body: the most fertile soil, so to speak. Specifically, it means reducing chronic inflammation and oxidative stress. Typically this starts with changing one’s

Brain Fitness News

Scientists, researchers and clinicians are not always in agreement about what may cause or prevent Alzheimer's Disease.

For example, a Feb. 2016 article in 'The Journal of Prevention of Alzheimer's Disease (JPAD)' says recent clinical trials suggest that 'some of the atrophy in the hippocampus and the cognitive decline associated with aging or Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) can be abated with interventions that increase physical fitness, stimulate cognitive skills, reduce stress, enhance levels of omega-3 fatty acids in the diet, and/or optimize the pattern of brain wave activity.'

However, in March 2016 a group of researchers and clinicians posted an editorial in JPAD that maintains that Alzheimer's Disease (AD) could be caused by a virus, particularly the herpes virus.

"One particular aspect of the disease has been neglected, even though treatment based on it might slow or arrest AD progression. We refer to the many studies, mainly on humans, implicating specific microbes in the elderly brain, notably herpes simplex virus type 1, Chlamydia pneumoniae (a cause of pneumonia, bronchitis and STD), and several types of spirochaete (bacteria).

If so, then exploring treatment with anti-virus medications may be the answer. 'We propose that further research on the role of infectious agents in AD causation, including prospective trials of antimicrobial therapy, is now justified.'

- *The Journal of Prevention of Alzheimer's Disease (jpreventionalzheimer.com)*

diet, says Paulette Weber, RD, LD/N at Sarasota's Center for Brain Health (thecbh.com).

Weber, a registered dietician and nutritionist, provides nutritional assessments and therapies designed to optimize brain health through nutrition. Inflammation, she says, is believed to be central to the development of many chronic conditions including Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Weber warns Boomers, and all age groups, to start making healthy choices as early as possible.

Five Factors for Brain Health

"There are potent factors that we know will improve brain health, slow down development of dementia and protect us against stroke and heart attack," says Dr. Michael Hoffmann, MD, PhD. Hoffmann is the medical research advisor to the Center for Brain Health. Hoffman narrows those factors to five simple rules:

1 **Get physical exercise.** Moderate activity, five times a week, helps to grow new brain cells.

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BRAIN HEALTH



2 Do cognitive exercise. The brain likes to learn new things. This can be as simple as taking different routes to work or you can go online to use brain-boosting apps. Luminosity.com is one, but just Google 'brain fitness,' there are plenty more.

3 Eat brain foods. Experts agree that a 'Mediterranean' diet is best for reducing inflammation in the body and, therefore, the brain. Hoffmann, who is a 'neuro-archeologist' adds that fruit and shellfish, in that order, were instrumental in the human evolution of brain function through diet.

4 Develop good sleep hygiene. Make sure you get healthy sleep every night. Downtime (whether meditation, 'mindfulness,' or simply sitting quietly for 15-20 minutes a day is a good idea too.

5 Socialize. Research shows that socialization helps promote brain growth in humans.

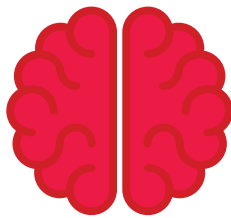
Dr. Hoffmann admits that adhering to these rules is easier said than done. "The vast majority of people aren't able to follow them for various reasons. But every single one will make a huge difference to your brain health: how you feel and how you function in your life," he adds.

Reboot Your Brain

Clear evidence that the brain maintains the ability to regenerate cells and wire new pathways as we age is the happy byproduct of research into developing 'cures' for illnesses such as dementia, Alzheimer's disease and stroke. "Research scientists are working round the clock to find a cure, especially for Alzheimer's – that is the Holy Grail," says Nicci Kobritz, President of the Center for Brain Health. In the meantime, "we have learned a lot about how the brain works and how to prevent problems," she adds.

Natural, age-related cognitive decline, "is not as inevitable as people think. There are things to do to keep the brain young," says George Rozelle, Owner and Executive Director of MindSpa, an integrative wellness center in Sarasota.

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“By re-training irregular brainwave patterns, we are assisting the brain to function better. This is similar to a computer that over time starts storing data that slows it down, and then needs a reboot.”

Gregg Sledziewski

offers a medicine bag full of approaches to mental fitness. This includes acupuncture, hyperbaric oxygen therapy and even flotation tanks. But its major tool for the repair of the brain is neurofeedback and high performance neurofeedback (HPN).

Neurofeedback is a computer-based method for improving memory, attention, mood, and sleep through providing the patient with information about his/her EEG pattern, and then rewarding normalization of brain wave activity through visual and auditory feedback

Simply put, neurofeedback is a type of biofeedback that uses real-time displays of brain activity – most commonly electroencephalography (EEG) – to teach self-regulation of brain function. Whereas HPN was developed to improve the problems that arise from traumatic brain injuries, like those experienced by retired NFL players.

The difference between the two is a case of degree: neurofeedback helps reset the brain; HPN is a way to rewire the brain. In both cases, neurotransmission is improved, resulting in improved brain function.

At the Brain Wave Center of Sarasota (1hpsarasota.com), brain mapping techniques are used to assess brain function and neurofeedback is used to gain brain health. “We consider ourselves an important part of the puzzle, says Gregg Sledziewski, Co-founder and Managing Director. “Neurofeedback is a safe, non-invasive way to retrain your brain.”

Sledziewski explains that seemingly unrelated issues such as stress, anger, depression, bad habits, and small injuries can take a toll on our brains, not just our bodies. Like the body, the brain needs exercise and rest to operate at peak performance. Neurofeedback is a measured learning process that takes advantage of the brain’s ability to self-regulate and seek balance. “By re-training irregular brainwave patterns, we are assisting the brain to function better. This is similar to a computer that over time starts storing data that slows it down, and then needs a reboot.”



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