

# Wellness and Keeping Your Brain Active

## Fun Facts and points to remember

**The brain is the most complex part of the human body. Functions of the brain include interpreter of the senses, initiator of body movement, and controller of behavior. Lying in its bony shell and washed by protective fluid, the brain is the source of all the qualities that define our humanity. The brain is the crown jewel of the human body.**

The normal aging process brings subtle changes in cognitive abilities. Committing new information to memory and recalling names and numbers can take longer. The ability to hold a piece of information in mind, such as a phone number, password or the location of a parked car, also declines with age. Some studies suggest a slow decline starts as early as age 30.

Our brains undergo myriad changes during the aging process. However, scientists are learning every day how adopting a healthy lifestyle can delay or minimise the negative consequences of these changes.

## You are your brain

Your brain determines every aspect of your life. It works tirelessly for you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Today we live longer and healthier lives. Our heart, our joints, and the rest of our bodies can outlive our brain. Your lifestyle choices have a profound impact on your brain health. Unlike aging and genetics, you have the power and control of your lifestyle choices.

The good news is that regardless of your age, there are proactive steps you can take to keep your brain healthy and potentially reduce your risk of developing dementia, depression, or other conditions.

## Here are seven ways you can keep up your mental fitness:

1. **Practice using your memory:** Regularly engaging in memory exercises can help improve both short and long-term recall. Make a list of grocery items, for example, and do your best to memorise it – then test yourself an hour later to see how many items you remember.
2. **Play ‘thinking’ games:** Research has shown that brain-training games can help keep older adults sharp for as many as 10 years longer. Whether it’s the daily crossword puzzle, Sudoku, Scrabble or another game that excites you, make an effort to engage in games or puzzles that make you think.
3. **Learn something new:** Taking on a new hobby or skill can improve both cognitive functioning and your sense of well-being as you age. Learning a foreign language, for example, is a process of listening and internalising new sounds which stimulates the brain. The same goes for new artistic or athletic pursuits – whether it’s cooking, painting, tennis, a musical instrument you’ve always wanted to learn – cultivating a new hobby is an excellent way to keep your mind active and learning.

4. **Seek out social interaction:** With regularly engaging in social activities and having stimulating conversations, you may reduce your chances to develop depression and dementia. Maintaining connections is one of the most effective ways to keep your spirits high and your mind busy and engaged.
  5. **Keep stress under control:** Chronic stress can wreak havoc on both the mind and the body, especially as we age. Though it is not always easy to let go of worries, fears, or responsibilities, it is important to make time each day to relax and reflect. Whether meditation, exercise, spending time with an animal, or treating yourself to a spa treatment makes you feel at ease, taking active steps to reduce stress will help you ward off depression and other mental health concerns such as anxiety or substance abuse.
  6. **Maintain physical fitness and a healthy diet:** An active, healthy body is critical in maintaining an active, healthy mind. By making certain lifestyle changes, eating a balanced, healthy diet, and enjoying physical activity such as walks or group exercise classes is a key way to maximise brain function and improve overall health.
  7. **Know where to get help if you need it.**
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