

Care and feeding of your brain

Maintain your general health.

The most important factor in keeping your brain healthy is to pay attention to your general health. Keep your body healthy. Eat well and exercise regularly. Avoid toxic substances that can effect your brain such as air pollution, smoking, excessive alcohol and street drugs. Avoid injury by wear protective gear such as seat belts and helmets when appropriate. Learn to manage stress.

Challenge your brain.

It is important to challenge your brain to learn new and novel tasks, especially processes that you've never done before. Examples include square-dancing, chess, tai chi, yoga, or sculpture. Here are some suggestions:

a) Break routines:

Use the opposite hand when performing routine tasks like brushing your teeth or operating the TV remote. This exercise can strengthen neural connections and even create new ones. For example, switch the hand you are using to control the computer mouse. Use the hand you normally do NOT use. What do you notice? Is it harder to be precise and accurate with your motions? If you are feeling uncomfortable and awkward don't worry, your brain is learning a new skill. Other ideas include go to work or to the store on a new route; eat with your opposite hand; shop at new grocery store or go through a certain portion of your daily routine with your eyes closed.

b) Try to include one or more of your senses in an everyday task:

Get dressed with your eyes closed; wash your hair with your eyes closed; share a meal and use only visual cues to communicate (no talking).

c) Combine two senses:

Listen to music and smell flowers; listen to the rain and tap your fingers; watch clouds and play with modeling clay at the same time

d) Travel:

Travel is another good way to stimulate your brain. It worked for our ancestors, the early homo sapiens. Their nomadic lifestyle provided a tremendous stimulation for their brains that led to the development of superior tools and survival skills. Early humans gained a crucial evolutionary edge from the flexibility and innovation required by their strategic lifestyle, which also led to a more diverse diet that allowed their brains to rapidly evolve.

e) Socialize:

Interacting with people in new or complex social settings is stimulating. Membership in clubs with an objective (like U3A) gives you an opportunity to exchange ideas and reflect on your thoughts and the thoughts of others.

With proper care and feeding of your brain, it should continue to serve you well for years to come. For more information on brain exercise look at:

<http://www.fi.edu/learn/brain/exercise.html#top>
<http://www.fi.edu/learn/brain/exercise.html#top>
<http://www.neurobics.com/>