

[IMAGE]

Exercise Your Brain

By Editorial Staff

We all know about the importance of proper nutrition and exercise to keep our muscles in good shape. But did you also know that giving the brain a workout is equally important?

Researchers from the Mayo Clinic and the University of Southern California have determined that computer-based mental training programs appear to improve cognitive performance in older people by as much as 10 years. And researchers from Harvard have found that taking beta-carotene long-term can improve cognitive function.

So what can you do to keep your brain as fit as the rest of you? Here are a few tips:

Move your body

A recent study from Columbia University in New York City found that people who exercised regularly for three months increased the blood flow to the hippocampus part of the brain, which is responsible for memory. This also can lead to the production of new brain cells. Sandra Aamodt, editor-in-chief of *Nature Neuroscience*, a leading scientific journal on brain research, explains that increased blood flow to the brain can offset mini-strokes, which can cause cognitive decline.

Eat your vegetables and fruits

Your mother was right all along! The Alzheimer's Association recommends a diet high in dark-colored vegetables (e.g., kale, spinach, beets and eggplant); colorful fruits (e.g., berries, raisins, prunes, oranges and red grapes) and fish such as salmon or trout high in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids to keep those neurons firing. James Joseph, director of the neuroscience lab at the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University, says, "We have found that the berry fruits improve neuronal communication."

Challenge your brain

Illustration of a human brain. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Games such as crossword puzzles, word jumbles or even *sudoku* (a numbers puzzle originating in Japan) keep those mental wheels turning. In

tests of experienced crossword puzzlers of all ages, those in their 60s and 70s did the best, according to a recent article in *U.S. News & World Report*.

Be social

Get involved with your community or participate in your favorite hobby with others. Researchers at Harvard found that those with at least five social ties were less likely to suffer cognitive decline than those with no social ties. Researchers at George Washington University found that elderly people who joined a choir stepped up their other activities during a 12-month period, while those who were not involved with the choir dropped out of other social activities.

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