

Brain Games: Steps to an Active Lifestyle

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More than ever before, Americans are expressing concern over memory loss and taking careful notice of any delays in their overall mental ability. This problem is most common among the “worried well.” This term refers to individuals who are actually maintaining excellent cognitive skills but may feel they aren’t quite as sharp as they once were. As a result, they become concerned about potentially developing Alzheimer’s disease or other neurodegenerative disorders.

One question often heard is, “What exercises and foods will keep my brain healthy?” If you go to your local library or bookstore, you are likely to find a wide variety of reading materials addressing this important topic. In addition, computer programs are available in which seniors can challenge themselves by increasing the intensity of the tasks. Finally, the internet can provide a vast catalog of information about different activities and lifestyle changes.

However, with so much information available, it can often be overwhelming. To find the best information, it is important to narrow your search. If you are concerned about potential memory loss, your primary goal should be to learn ways to keep your thinking skills sharp and to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Aging and Memory Loss

While the normal aging process may produce subtle changes in memory and thinking abilities, seniors should still be able to maintain their ability to learn new activities. Likewise, as seniors age their physical abilities might not be as robust as they were years earlier, but they should still be able to remain active.

While every person is unique, professionals associate a few typical changes with the normal aging process:

- Taking a little longer to learn new information
- Requiring more time to retrieve stored information

- Increased difficulty with multi-tasking (doing several things at once)

It is vital that Floridians of all ages take an active part in keeping their brains healthy and active. The Memory Disorder Clinic at Mayo Clinic Jacksonville suggests the following tips to keep your brain in tip-top shape:

- Stimulate Your Thinking. Keep your mind active by engaging in activities that are mentally challenging. Reading a new book, completing a crossword or picture puzzle, learning a new card game or using a computer game can all be worthwhile and important activities.
- Don't Forget About Your Body. Exercising several times a week can have positive effects on your body and your mind. Pick an activity that you enjoy and will stick with. Walking can be a great way to increase your activity level and enjoy the natural surroundings. Yoga, tai chi and other exercises are also popular for maintaining a healthy physique.
- Include Vitamins. Millions of Americans do not get enough vital nutrients from the foods they eat. Embracing a daily vitamin regimen can be extremely beneficial. However, make sure you consult with your physician before making any changes to either your diet or exercise routine. Your doctor can determine what vitamins will be most effective.
- Be Nutty. Try adding almonds, walnuts and other healthy nuts into your baking dishes and salads. Most nuts contain essential fatty acids, which are vital for growth, healthy skin and hair, blood pressure control, immune response and blood clotting. By themselves, nuts also make a healthy snack.
- Make Fish Your Friends. Adding fish to your diet at least two to three times each week will provide a healthy dose of omega-3 fatty acids, which are thought to protect those precious brain cells.
- Color Your Fruit. Studies have shown that dark colored fruit, such as blueberries and pomegranates, are high in antioxidants. An Ohio State University study suggested that dark colored fruits may be linked to the prevention of colon cancer.

- Stay Healthy. Take care of yourself by addressing any health problems that could lead to diabetes, obesity, high cholesterol or any related cardiovascular issue.
- Maintain a positive outlook. Everyone experiences times when they feel overwhelmed, sad or anxious. If this becomes a persistent problem interfering with your daily activities or enjoyment, seek professional guidance.

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