



August 2024

Reflections

Light Up Your Brain

*9 Activities That Power Up Your Brain
and Keep You Sharp*

Regularly putting your brain through its mental paces is a brilliant habit, no matter your age. Little things that you do on the daily can positively impact your brain health and, thus, influence your entire quality of life.

Neuropsychologist Katherine Reiter, PhD, from Cleveland Clinic's Center for Brain Health, says it's essential to keep your mind active. "Research shows that engaging in cognitively stimulating activities is associated with less cognitive decline and larger brain volumes in older adults," says Reiter.

But what kind of activities power up your brain? Here are some brain-benefitting exercises based on the latest research and suggestions from top experts:

1 | Be a hometown cartographer

Where's your favorite grocery store? And the nearest school?

Practicing a little cartography and drawing a map of an area you've recorded in your mind is a fun and beneficial task for your brain. (Relying on Google Maps all the time . . . not so much.)

Changing up your usual routes and taking a different way to your destination can be good for you too.



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2| Have a puzzle party

Jigsaw or crossword puzzles challenge the brain to concentrate, improve short-term memory, and improve thinking, according to research published in *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*. A study published in *Neuron* indicates that your brain leaves its “usual superhighways” and ventures out onto new pathways to solve a sticky sudoku problem.

3| Drink from the fountain of youth

A good workout gets your heart pumping and strengthens your muscles. That’s usually how we think about exercise: It’s for your body.

Kelly McGonigal, PhD, author of *The Joy of Movement: How Exercise Helps Us Find Happiness, Hope, Connection, and Courage*, writes that exercise also provides a feel-good neurotransmitter called dopamine. In one trial, adults in a drug-abuse treatment program participated in an hour of walking, jogging, and strength training three times a week. Eight weeks later, their brains showed an increase in dopamine receptor availability: They were literally making their brains more sensitive to joy by exercising! McGonigal writes that, as we age, adults lose up to 13 percent of their dopamine receptors each decade. Physical activity prevents this, and adults who exercise can avoid the loss of everyday enjoyment and continue to experience life’s pleasures like younger people.

4| Keep on reaching higher

Like many things in life, the physical exercises with the most benefit for the brain are the activities that require us to change and reach new goals.

“The key is to *improve* our fitness level, regardless of our starting point,” says Reiter.

For example, she says that relatively inactive people may begin stretching and walking.

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SUDOKO Fill the empty spaces with numbers 1 to 9 so that every row, column and 3 x 3 box contains all 9 numbers. (*Solution on back.*)

Over time, they can increase the amount of walking or the intensity, perhaps by adding light hand weights.

Reiter says the same advice stands for more active individuals: increase the exercise time or intensity.

For that extra brain boost, it may be helpful to incorporate different types of exercises. In a recent Harvard newsletter, John N. Morris, PhD, suggests that swimming is a great workout for the brain because it involves “constant thinking, processing, and learning” as you are mindful of your breathing, strokes, and kicks, all of which exercises the brain in different ways.

5| Get crafty

Knitting, crocheting, and crafting have benefits, too, and access to learning new crafts has never been easier.

Researchers at the Mayo Clinic interviewed over 1,300 older people and found that crafters were at lower risk for brain problems and memory loss.

6| Frame this

One study found that learning photography and quilting enhanced participants' visual-spatial abilities and sharpened their memory function.

7| Hit the right note

The fascinating, science-based folks at BrainFacts.org say that playing an instrument is like getting a total body workout. Unlike other brain-training activities, experts say that playing an instrument recruits almost every region of the brain, including vision, sound, movement, and memory.

8| Add variety to your life

Whatever activities or hobbies you like, changing things up now and then is critical.

Research gathered over two decades shows that adding new brain-engaging activities protects and empowers your brain. Even if you try something new and aren't especially good at it, your brain still loves doing something different.

9| Stay social

Having a busy social life helps maintain brain health. Seek out book clubs, try a new class, or pick up a sport.

Perhaps you tend to be more introverted? "Social activities can mean different things to different people," Reiter says. Although joining a club is great, it doesn't have to involve large groups in a public place. Reiter says talking with family on the phone or reconnecting with old friends are great options. ■

SHARP Corner

(Supplemental Healthcare Adventist Retirement Plan)

Your HRA—Mind the Gap

Let's review important health reimbursement account (HRA) requirements. To be eligible for the HRA benefit, a retiree must be eligible for healthcare coverage through your Adventist Retirement benefits, and also must be enrolled in a medical and/or prescription drug plan through Alight, without a gap in coverage. A gap in coverage is defined as a period in which you may have been enrolled in a medical and/or prescription plan, but you do not have an enrollment through Alight.

Sometimes a gap occurs if you move to a different zip code and contact your insurance providers directly rather than contacting Alight. A gap can also occur if you call your carrier with a new mailing address, or a friend recommends a local agent to help you.

If our team knows you've moved to a new zip code, we try to remind you to contact Alight. Sometimes we don't know you've moved because you didn't contact us. We also review enrollment reports from Alight that may show

you've ended your Alight enrollment. If we see an issue, you will likely hear from one of our SHARP assistants.

Remember that your unused HRA balance is rolled over each year. So, just because you are receiving reimbursement, doesn't necessarily mean you are currently enrolled. If you know that you've spoken to your insurance provider directly, or you've enrolled through a local agent, we encourage you to reach out to Alight by calling 844-360-4714 and ensure you are still enrolled in a plan through them. If you learn there is a gap in your enrollment history through Alight, ask your advisor what to do next. You can also call SHARP at 443-391-7338 for help.

Our goal is to help you keep your HRA eligibility, so please remember to let us know if you've moved and reach out to Alight if you need to make any changes in your enrollments.

We're with you on the journey! ■



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(Solution
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