Brain Health

As we age, many of us work harder to maintain or improve our physical health. We eat right, get enough sleep, have medical check-ups and exercise regularly. Most of us do not realize that these lifestyle choices also have a positive impact on brain health and function. Researchers are consistently reporting that what is good for our bodies is also good for our brains. There are many ways to keep the brain healthy.

Cognitive health can be promoted by:
- Eating a healthy diet
- Being physically active
- Having social/emotional support
- Decreasing stress
- Challenging the brain

Brain Fitness Strategies

Researchers agree that challenging the brain, especially as individuals get older, is beneficial. The chosen activities should be interesting in order to stick with them. It is also important to reach beyond what is comfortable and try more difficult puzzles or new activities.

Activity suggestions that challenge the brain include:
- Board games
- Crossword puzzles
- Ping Pong
- Word games
- Learn a new instrument
- Number puzzles/games
- Juggling
- Reading
- Card games
- Creative hobbies
- Engage in conversation
- Puzzles
- Dancing
- Video games
- Sequencing games
- Playing cards
- Volunteering
- Learn a new language
- Take a class or course
- Learn sign language
- Journaling
- Travel

Daily life experiences are also occasions for learning and enhancing memory. In fact, we should look for opportunities in everyday life to continue to challenge the brain.
Things to try:

1. Each time you shop at the grocery store, start your shopping at a different place in the store.
2. Grocery shop without using your list.
3. Read the newspaper and share some of the most interesting stories or articles with a friend. Try to remember details.
4. Listen to music that is not typically your favorite. Listen carefully and try to remember the lyrics.
5. Take a nature walk and use your senses to take in as much as you can. When you return, record your thoughts on paper or in a journal.
6. Play a new board game with friends or family members.
7. Take out a yearbook and try to recall the names of your classmates by looking at their pictures.
8. Rearrange a room in your house.
9. Wash your face with your non-dominant hand.
10. Create a new dish or recipe and share it with friends.
11. Try a new hobby.
12. Master a new type of technology (i.e. DVD player, computer program, video game, etc).
13. Keep a journal.
14. Take a short nap daily.
15. Don’t worry about forgetfulness.

It’s never too late to start a “wits” fitness program. All it takes is going for it!

References

Merzenich, M. “Change minds for the better.” *The Journal on Active Aging*, 4 (6), 22-29.
www.delorie.com/game-room/mazes
www.didyouknow.org/riddles