BRAIN TRAINING: KEEPING YOUR BRAIN YOUNG & HEALTHY

The human brain is an intricate organ that only weighs 2-4 pounds. You may already know that the brain is responsible for all of the functions in the body, but did you know you can improve your brain health at any age? And it’s not so difficult to do.

According to Dr. Paul Nussbaum, a renowned neurophysiologist and author of “Save Your Brain,” we can improve our brain health and promote “brain reserve” just by practicing a healthy lifestyle. Brain reserve is important because it’s our brain’s natural defense against diseases like Alzheimer’s and dementia.

Healthy Ways to Boost Your Brain Reserve

When a brain is exposed to new environments and complex situations it activates the cortex, or the part of the brain that helps make connections. To promote this process and keep your brain young and healthy, Dr. Nussbaum recommends increasing physical activity, mental stimulation, socialization, nutrition and spirituality.

Physical Activity
With every heart beat, your brain demands 25% of the blood your heart pumps. Boosting your heart rate can increase the amount of the nutrient- and oxygen-rich blood the brain receives. Try engaging in cardiovascular activity for at least 30 minutes most days of the week by:

• walking briskly or running
• biking
• skating
• dancing
• playing a game of tag with the kids

You can also exercise your brain by using both sides of your body for daily activities (e.g. brushing your teeth and/or writing your name using your non-dominant hand).

Mental Stimulation
Stimulate your brain with mental tasks that are new and complex for you. You can try:

• learning a new language
• traveling to new places
• playing a musical instrument
• playing board games
• developing hobbies

Socialization
An inactive, isolated brain increases your risk for dementia. You can improve your brain reserve (and fight brain disease) by:

• building a network of new friends
• strengthening family bonds
• relying on forgiveness
• retiring from work, not from life

**Nutrition**

Food fuels our body’s everyday processes and movements, and the quality (and quantity) of what you eat impacts brain health. Try:

• consuming more essential nutrients (omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants)
• eating less saturated and trans fats
• leaving food on your plate (eating 80% of what you plan to eat)

**Spirituality**

The human brain seeks balance and peace. Finding these things can slow you down and help you connect with who you are and what you value most. Consider:

• learning deep breathing techniques
• incorporating meditation into each day
• learning yoga

No matter how old you are, it’s always a good time to begin practicing a healthy lifestyle. Take care of your brain, and it will take care of you.


**HEART HEARTY WAYS TO FLAVOR FOODS**

The American Heart Association’s (AHA) recommendation for a heart healthy diet includes reducing sodium, sugar and fat in the foods we eat. Consuming too much sodium causes fluid retention and requires the heart to pump harder. Over time, this can lead to a rise in blood pressure, which damages arteries and increases your risk of heart attack or stroke – a risk that even people who don’t have a family history of high blood pressure should be concerned about.

**Cut the sodium, not the flavor.**

Eating more meals prepared at home allows you to control the amount of sodium you consume. You can substitute dozens of different seasonings and ingredients to spice up your low-sodium meals to keep them tasty and heart healthy. Try some of these ideas:

• Replace salt in a recipe with another herb or spice (curry powder, thyme, tarragon, onion or garlic powder, etc.)
• Marinate chicken breasts or pork chops in lemon juice, orange juice or wine
• Toss in a few fruits and vegetables, such as dried apricots, raisins or pepper for extra flavor
• Roast vegetables such as red peppers, parsnips and squash to bring out their flavors
• Spice up a stir-fry with garlic, ginger, chili pepper, rice vinegar and/or lime juice
• Toss your pasta with freshly chopped garlic
• Choose fresh mozzarella or cheeses labeled “low-sodium”

You can also use a commercial salt-free seasoning blend (such as Mrs. Dash), or make your own mix with this recipe from the AHA:

• 1 tbsp. garlic powder
• ½ tsp. cayenne pepper
• 1 tsp. of each: mace, basil, onion powder, black pepper, thyme, sage, parsley flakes, marjoram and savory

**Resources:** heart.org, webmd.com, welcoa.org, nlhib.org
How can I stay on track and eat healthy while I’m at a restaurant?

These days it’s easier to find healthy options on restaurant menus. In fact, many restaurants remove the guess work by promoting lighter, healthier meal alternatives with a special symbol or section of the menu.

No lighter options? That’s okay. You can also cut the fat and calories in many dishes by following these easy tips:

1. **Order dressing on the side.** Dressing your own salad gives you control over how much is enough for you.

2. **Substitute sides.** Exchange fried or creamy sides with steamed veggies, fruit, a side salad or cup of soup. Some restaurants charge extra for substitutions, but it’s worth the cost.

3. **Hold the sauce.** Sandwiches, wraps, burgers and even sushi can come drenched in sauces that add calories and fat. Ask for no sauce or order your sauce on the side.

4. **Make it vegetarian.** Almost any order (particularly pizza, rice bowls, pasta dishes and even sandwiches or wraps) can be made vegetarian by simply asking for the meal “without the meat.” Be sure to ask for extra veggies in place of the meat.

5. **Control your portion size.** Restaurant servings are often too large to eat in one sitting. When your meal arrives, put half into a “to go” box before you even begin eating.

---

**BAKED SALMON DIJON**

This creamy dish is full of heart healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Serve with brown rice, fresh asparagus and a side salad for a hearty, nutrient-rich meal.

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup fat free sour cream
- 2 tsp. dried dill
- 3 tbsp. scallions (green onions), finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 ½ lb. salmon fillet, cut into 6 portions (4 oz. ea.)
- ½ tsp. garlic powder
- 2 tbsp. dijon mustard
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- Fat-free cooking spray

**Directions:** Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Lightly oil baking sheet with cooking spray. In a small bowl, whisk sour cream, dill, scallions, mustard and lemon juice. Set aside. Place salmon, skin side down, on prepared sheet. Sprinkle with garlic powder and pepper. Spread with sour cream mixture. Bake salmon until just opaque in center, about 20 minutes. Makes 6 (4 oz.) servings.

**Nutrition information per 4 oz. serving:** 196 cal; 7 g fat, 2 g sat fat; 76 mg cholesterol; 229 mg sodium; < 1g fiber; 5 g carbohydrates; 27g protein

*Recipe courtesy of The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute*