

Dr. Nussbaum's 50 Tips for Brain Health

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1. Know these three facts about your brain:

Your brain weighs about 3 pounds
Your Brain is composed of nearly 60% fat
Your Brain demands 25% of the blood from each heartbeat
2. Start each day with a quiet 12 minutes of mindfulness and meditation.
3. Walk briskly each day for 25 minutes.
4. Increase your fish intake to 8 ounces per week.
5. Increase your daily fruits and vegetables intake to 6 fist-full servings.
6. Forgive someone who has hurt you.
7. Pray on a daily basis.
8. Dance daily with total body movement.
9. Engage in a novel and complex activity several times a month.
10. Travel and use different routes to and from work or store.
11. Make one new friend a month.
12. Engage in aerobic exercise several times a week.
13. Try a yoga class, even chair or gentle yoga.
14. Treat yourself to a massage.
15. Learn a new language, including sign language.
16. Read and stay current in the news.
17. Write and try your hand at poetry.
18. Consider speaking in public.
19. Play a musical instrument and sing.
20. Use utensils when you eat.
21. Take a Tai Chi class for balance.
22. Include brain fitness such as Rosetta Stone Fitbrains in your daily life.
23. Learn how to use the computer and Facebook to stay engaged.
24. Garden and knit.
25. Read Save Your Brain to understand how lifestyle can shape your brain for health.
26. Have mercy on yourself and on others.
27. Visualize the warmth of Love and kindness.
28. Give some of your possessions to others.
29. Clean and organize your room and surroundings.
30. Engage in daily deep breathing exercises.
31. Engage in daily progressive muscle relaxation.
32. Participate in a weekly meditation class.
33. Yawn as frequently as you can, as this is good for the brain.
34. Sleep at least 8 hours a day.
35. Eat breakfast each morning.
36. Tell someone you love him or her each day.
37. Increase antioxidants in your diet.

38. Define your purpose in life.
39. Actively think happy and positive thoughts daily.
40. Refrain from anger or hostility.
41. Meet with your PCP at least annually.
42. Monitor your blood pressure throughout the year.
43. Consider the RC21x.com for monitoring your own cognitive and motor skills.
44. Do not take supplements without your Doctor's advice.
45. Meet with a financial planner.
46. Text or email one kind thought to someone daily.
47. Smile as much as you can.
48. Draw a picture of what happiness is for you and visualize it daily.
49. Increase your network of friends.
50. Give genuine thanks for the day

When is Memory Loss a Problem?

Others often ask me when they should be concerned about a memory problem. Most people experience word finding problems (Dysnomia), memory problems, and other cognitive changes beginning in the 50s. Indeed the brain begins to change structurally around that time period and likely relates to some of the cognitive changes we experience. Such word finding difficulty and other cognitive changes can be a reflection of normal changes or it might also represent a sign of pathological impairment. Regardless, my answer is always the same and that is **to get a neuropsychological examination so that your cognitive ability can be measured against your own expected range of performance and also against normative data for your age and educational background.**

A proper assessment of memory, language, spatial skill, attention, and executive function is the best way to apply empirical measurement (numbers) to answer the question “should I be concerned about my memory?” Until such an examination is completed, speculation and worry will rule the day. The advantages of completing a neuropsychological examination is that you will have a baseline measure of your cognitive ability to compare annual measurement against, you will be able to begin proper treatments should the examination results necessitate, and you may even learn that your cognitive functioning is quite normal.

An annual assessment of memory and other thinking abilities is a great idea for everyone to consider seriously and to make it part of your ongoing planning for health and longevity. I recommend such an annual assessment beginning at age 50 because of the natural changes that occur in the brain and other systems in the body. Such changes do not infer pathology or disease, but having a baseline and regular ongoing measure of cognitive functioning is not only smart, but is quite useful to you as part of your healthy lifestyle and to your doctor who works to manage your health.

One suggestion is to begin a conversation with your doctor about your cognitive health, to apply ongoing measurement of your cognitive health starting around age 50, and to live a brain health lifestyle ® that helps to promote your brain health and longevity. Your doctor will know about local experts in neuropsychology who can provide this annual assessment and contribute to your overall health.

Dr. Nussbaum
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The Role of Caregiver

There really is not a textbook, no blueprint, and no guide on how to be a caregiver. This is true despite the fact that for Alzheimer's disease alone, there are nearly 15 million caregivers and that number will rise dramatically in the next 25 years. Consider all the caregivers for loved ones suffering the different forms of illness and it is easy to appreciate how important the role of caregiver is in our society.

It is true that caregivers are a special group. They are patient, compassionate, caring people who place the needs of others in front of their own. We all agree that these are highly admirable qualities, but it is also true that over time such qualities can be detrimental to one's own health. It is indeed common for caregivers to be so focused on their role of caring for another that their own health and wellbeing gets neglected. We know that at least 33% of caregivers suffer depression, while others experience sleep disorder, anxiety, lost wages and reduced time spent at work.

Caregivers are human beings and it is normal for feelings of guilt, irritability, frustration, resentment, and even anger to creep into their day as the pressure and time demands inherent on caregiving increase. Perhaps, a guide or a class on caregiving could be required prior to our graduation from high school! Not a bad thought, but I tend to think we are all born with the natural characteristics of caregiving and that some of us actually express this beautiful talent, this form of loving-kindness.

I have spent nearly 30 years caring for those with Alzheimer's disease and for each person who struggles with this disease there are two or more family members or friends who surround their loved one with support and hope. I have watched with great admiration the sweet and patient care granted by the caregivers and it has been a constant reminder of the goodness that we humans have.

To all the caregivers who read this blog, God bless you and know that you represent the best of humanity. Continue to love, since love is the best medicine, and please take some time for your own needs.

Dr. Nussbaum

Prescribing Exercise

Like many who are interested in health, I have been an outspoken champion on the benefits of movement, physical activity, and exercise. For me, the importance of exercise is directly linked to brain health in the form of learning, mood, energy, and esteem. I also appreciate that exercise helps nearly all parts of the body such as the heart, bones, joints, muscles, and digestion.

Research has been quite robust on the benefits of regular exercise and health. Scholars such as Charles Hillman and Kirk Erickson have been leaders in demonstrating the benefits of physical activity to our structural and functional brains and bodies. Now, a new article written by Dr. Hausenblas and published in US. News (8-5-15) raises the question I too have been asking for years, "Why don't physicians prescribe exercise?"

The article underscores the fact that exercise is one behavior, one intervention and indeed prescription that significantly impacts our overall health. The science is clear as noted above in that exercise is not only preventative, but it can also help treat chronic conditions such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and depression. I would also include anxiety with this list and there are still others such as cognitive problems. Research indicates that people who exercise regularly can expect to live an average of seven years longer those who are inactive.

A new initiative called Exercise is Medicine ® focuses on encouraging health care providers to include physical activity when creating treatment plans their patients. A key component to this program is to have all health care providers assess their patient's physical activity at every visit. Physical activity should be recorded as a vital sign during patient visits and to encourage able patients to meet physical activity guidelines.

Research published in the Journal of Physical Activity and Health indicates that more than 50% of the physicians trained in the U.S. in 2013 received no formal education in physical activity, and that they are not prepared to help their patients with their exercise plan. Dr. Bob Sallis suggested exercise be listed in the Physician's Desk Reference as it is probably the most powerful drug available.

The Mayo Clinic noted that nearly 70% of Americans take at least one prescribed medication costing us \$374 billion in 2014. We are a nation reliant on medication and a culture in search of a quick fix. Perhaps exercise can begin to be presented as a medicine and we can continue to educate all ages of the benefits of exercise and physical activity to our health and happiness.

Dr. Nussbaum's Behavioral Tips

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep is an important part of our life and relates to many different health issues such as our weight, hormonal activity, memory and cognitive consolidation and renewal of our organism. While not an exact science, adults should acquire more than 6 hours of sleep each night and teenagers and children at least 8 hours of sleep a night.

Sleep gets affected by many factors to include:

- Pain
- Anxiety
- Medication side effects
- Depression
- Relationship Problems
- Medical Condition such as Apnea or Narcolepsy

Some estimates are that nearly 35 million Americans suffer some form of sleep disorder and this translates into reduced cognitive and functional efficiency, mood disorder, and even medical disorders.

Sleep Hygiene Program

For many people sleep problems occur because of anxiety and the following program is suggested as a plan to implement in combination with your Doctor's advice and treatment regimen.

Sleep is a learned condition that means your brain and body relate the bed and routine of sleep with sleeping. A sleep disorder is often a disruption in this routine and the Brain and Body have "unlearned" that sleep is related to the bed. The following plan assists you and your brain in re-establishing the connection between sleep and the bed.

- Establish a time to go to bed that is the same or nearly the same each night.
- Establish a time to rise each morning.
- You are to follow these times with heightened attention to establish a fixed routine.
- Upon entering the bed, give yourself 20 minutes to fall asleep. If you do not fall asleep, get out of the bed. The BED IS A PLACE to SLEEP.
- Do not eat, drink, read, or watch TV in the bed.
- Once you leave the bed go get something done that occupies your mind.

- You may also establish a “worry chair” outside of the bedroom where you can go sit and worry all you want. Do not avoid or resist worrying once you leave the bed. Your brain wants to worry so let it worry; just do not worry in bed.
- I encourage you keep a journal next to the worry chair so you can document your worries. By putting your worries on paper, they leave your brain and you can observe them as outside of you.
- When you believe you have worried enough return to bed and again give yourself 20 minutes to fall asleep. If you do not fall asleep the same rules apply and you are to leave the bed and go complete a chore or sit in the worry chair. This may take several trips at first and the subtle punishment of having to leave your bed will reinforce the relationship between bed and sleep for you.
- I encourage everyone with a sleep disorder to wear a mask over your eyes as this increases darkness that can promote Melatonin, an important hormone that increases sleep behavior.
- Do not consume caffeine in the afternoon or evening and reduce alcohol intake when sleep is problematic.
- Exercise daily as this will help with sleep in the pm.
- Do not eat large meals after 6pm and reduce snacks with sugar in the pm.
- Remove all music, television, computers, phones, etc. from the bedroom.
- Establish the bedroom as a place for sleep and intimacy only.
- Kids should not be playing in your bed.
- Work on what sources of anxiety you have and use prayer and meditation on a daily basis as a means of managing the anxiety.
- Learn how to breathe rhythmically and use progressive muscle relaxation prior to entering the bed each night.
- White noise might be helpful to some.
- Make room cooler than typical.
- Make room as dark as possible.
- Talk to your doctor about any medication side effects that might be causing sleep disruption.
- Patience and routine will help you re-establish your bed as a place to sleep.

Dr. Nussbaum