

# 10 Ways to Improve Your Brain Health



- 1. Do “neurobic” exercises to strengthen neural pathways.** Certain cognitive exercises and brain games can create new associations between different brain parts, says neurobiologist Lawrence Katz of Duke University. Neurobics include getting dressed or showering in the dark, switching what you normally wear on one side to the other (e.g., put your watch or bracelet on your opposite wrist), using your opposite hand to brush your teeth, and cooking ethnic foods that you’ve never prepared before.
- 2. Limit your alcohol intake to keep your brain “big.”** The more alcohol you consume, the lower your brain volume becomes. Scientists at Wellesley College in Massachusetts found that low to moderate levels of alcohol helps protect your health from cardiovascular disease, but heavy drinking shrinks brains. These researchers define heavy drinking as more than 14 drinks per week, moderate drinking as 8 to 14 drinks per week, and low as less than 7 drinks per week. To improve your brain health, keep the alcohol consumption to a minimum.
- 3. Try something new to sharpen concentration.** An active brain can slow the mental decline that comes with age. “A lifetime of good mental habits pays off,” says University of Alberta researcher Dr. Dennis Foth. “People who are curious at a young age are more likely to be mentally active and stay active as they age. And we found it’s never too late to start. With a little effort, even people in their 70s and 80s can see dramatic improvements.” Memorizing poetry, learning a new musical instrument, or taking Spanish or French lessons are great ways to increase memory and sharpen concentration.
- 4. Smell the sandalwood to increase your memory.** “Natural scents have a direct pathway to the brain and research shows that some chemical constituents of aromatherapy oils, particularly... sesquiterpenes can cross the blood-brain barrier and increase oxygen flow to the brain,” says Michelle Schoffro Cook, doctor of natural medicine and author of *The Brain Wash*. Extra oxygen increases energy, immune function, positive moods, and learning. Frankincense and sandalwood are particularly effective at increasing oxygen levels in the brain. Aromatherapy also decreases stress (and stress decreases brain health).
- 5. Do the tango to strengthen cognitive abilities.** Dance requires twists and turns that strengthens brain connections. Learning the cha-cha-cha can nourish brain cells, which translates to cognitive skills in the real world. “Exercise can protect the brain against environmental toxins by counteracting free radicals and reducing inflammation,” says Schoffro Cook, author of *The Brain Wash*. Physical activity is one of the best ways to promote the growth of new brain cells and reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s.
- 6. Sleep to boost memory.** Your brain requires huge amounts of energy to function properly; sleep boost memory and allows your brain to process information. “Though it’s not sexy, the traditional sleep advice is still effective,” says Dr Rachel Morehouse of the Atlantic Sleep Centre. Sleep little – if at all – during the day because naps rob you of sleep at night. To improve your

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overall brain health, get up and go to bed at set times. Stay active but avoid exercising in the evening because it keeps you awake. Wind down before you go to bed with music or a book. To improve your memory, enjoy healthy food, eat light meals at night, and avoid caffeine.

**7. Volunteer to lower your stress and increase mental functioning.** “Good Samaritans have been found to have lower stress levels and a sense of well-being, factors that add up to better overall health, including brain health,” says Schoffro Cook, author of *The Brain Wash*. The brain benefits of volunteering include increased mental functioning and better communication skills. The key may be in the “helper’s high” – the sense of calmness and well-being that comes from helping others. Volunteering can also improve your brainy health by raising your self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy.

**8. Socialize with people to improve your memory.** Talking can increase memory and cognitive skills, says Oscar Ybarra, a psychologist at the University of Michigan. Further, he believes that visiting with a friend or neighbor may be as helpful as doing a crossword puzzle. About his study, he said, “Short-term social interaction lasting for just 10 minutes boosted participants’ intellectual performance as much as engaging in so-called ‘intellectual’ activities for the same amount of time.”

**9. Strive for variety.** Don’t rely on a particular practice, supplement, or food to improve your brain health. Instead, incorporate different activities into your life. For instance, take a child hiking if you normally spend time with adults; go for a run instead of the usual yoga class. The more you challenge your brain and body, the healthier and stronger they become.

**10. Reduce your exposure to neurotoxins.** Harmful chemicals, food additives, and chemically altered ingredients can harm your brain and body health. While it’s not possible to completely eliminate pollution from your environment, you can limit it. Pure products, organic produce, natural fragrances, whole foods, and fresh air will improve your brain health and sharpen concentration.

Read more at Suite101: *How to Improve Your Brain Health: 10 Ways to Increase Memory, Concentration, and Cognitive Abilities*  
[http://cognitive-psychology.suite101.com/article.cfm/how\\_to\\_improve\\_your\\_brain\\_health#ixzz0wi5pMupf](http://cognitive-psychology.suite101.com/article.cfm/how_to_improve_your_brain_health#ixzz0wi5pMupf)

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