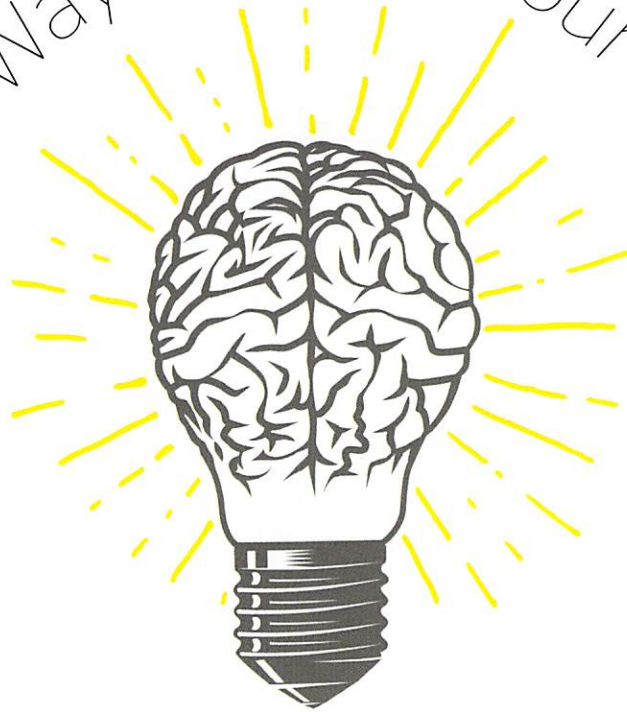


Five Ways to Build Your Brain



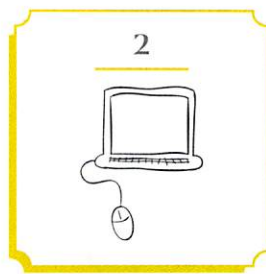
HERE'S HOW TO GIVE YOUR BRAIN THE TLC IT NEEDS

Building a healthy brain is not so different from improving your overall health. Although changes in cognition and memory are a normal part of aging, brain disease doesn't have to be. To treat your brain right, check out our five-point plan.

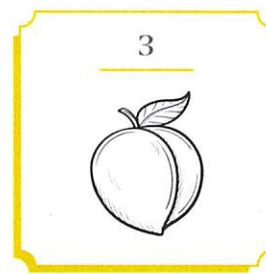
▼ Establish healthy eating habits for your family.



Take a walk



Learn something new



Follow the right diet for you

Any movement can have benefits, even if you start small. “Sometimes the first step is just to get up and moving,” says Anne O’Rear, community connect coordinator at the Alzheimer’s Association Greater Michigan Chapter. When you move, you increase blood flow, which helps stave off dementia caused by conditions that reduce blood flow to your brain. Keeping active also combats depression and anxiety, making it more likely you’ll be out and about the next day.

“People often ask if they should be doing crossword puzzles to help their brains,” O’Rear says. “Those are fine, but any activity that engages your brain is equally beneficial.” So, put on your thinking cap, whether by reading, doing brain games or fixing your toaster. O’Rear’s suggestion? “Sign up for classes at a local college, community center or library. It gets you out of the house, helps you meet new people and engages your brain, all at once. Better yet, make it a cooking class and learn to prepare healthy meals.”

You don’t have to go far to find yet another article on the “best diet”: low-carb, low-fat, vegan—the list goes on. Bottom line: Work with a registered dietitian to determine which eating plan will stabilize your blood pressure and blood sugar, help keep weight off and promote a strong heart. “What makes a healthy brain is what makes a healthy body,” says Dr. Brent A. Funk, PSYD, neuropsychologist at Henry Ford Health System. “Your brain is just another organ.”

A healthy diet includes a variety of fruits and vegetables eaten throughout the day. Healthy portions of these at each meal, along with avoiding salt, can help reduce your risk of hypertension, or high blood pressure. Be sure to include a couple of 3-ounce fish portions each week. Fatty fish, like salmon, provide omega-3 fatty acids, which have anti-inflammatory properties. And a small handful of unsalted nuts can make a good snack.





Have a conversation – or two or three

While you're in the park, take time to chat with a fellow walker, or invite along a friend or coworker. "Remaining social is one of the Alzheimer's Association's top three most important tips for a healthy brain," O'Rear says. If you're an introvert, seek out groups that revolve around a passion – maybe a small book group, or go fishing with a couple of other enthusiasts. Even if you venture out alone, try to be around people with similar interests such as at the museum or zoo. "Being active and being social tend to go together," O'Rear says. "Getting out of the house for a social event will get you moving, and the more connections you make socially, the more you'll want to get out of the house."

Finally, warning signs that your brain health is deteriorating aren't just related to memory, like forgetting where you left your keys, O'Rear says. "If you can trace your steps and find the keys, you're probably fine. But if you can't remember when you used them last, or what keys are for, that could be a cause for concern." ■



Put yourself to bed

The best way to top off your day is with a solid night's sleep because your brain needs lots of high-quality slumber. "Chronically poor sleep leads to a process where you're not clearing some of the buildup of different types of waste products on brain cells," Dr. Funk says. "Poor sleep is one of the most common issues we see in our clinic."

He suggests setting a consistent time for lights-out and wakeup, and he highly recommends turning off phones, TVs and tablets at least half an hour before shuteye. If behavioral changes don't help, he sends patients to a sleep specialist to check for disorders such as sleep apnea.

BRAIN HEALTH HELP FROM HAP

Try something new and get some exercise with Detroit MoGo, the city's first bike share program. HAP and Henry Ford Health System are the title sponsors of MoGo.

How it works:

1 Purchase a pass online with the Transit App, or at any one of the 43 bike stations across 10 neighborhoods. Options are \$8 for a day, \$18 for a monthly pass and \$80 for an annual pass.

2 Pick up a bike and take as many 30-minute-long rides as you want while your pass is active.

3 Return the bike to any station after your 30-minute trip. Then, you can check out another bike or explore the city. For more information, go to hap.org/mogo.

There's a growing body of research that shows that mindfulness can help brain health. Try our five-minute guided meditation to reduce stress at hap.org/meditation.

We have healthy recipes for every season and taste. Check out our blog for some new favorites at hap.org/healthy_recipes.

Save money on fitness, nutrition and wellness products at hap.org/discounts.

> Turn off your screens and go to sleep.

