

Fun Activities for the Brain

Pop Quiz :Form teams or play individually. Have someone make a list of something (or find them online) like mammals or types of cars, read the list outloud and see who can recall the most items the fastest an hour later.

Learn the lyrics to a new song and sing it, or take a class to learn to play a musical instrument. Not ready for the violin or the piano? Try the harmonica. It's easy to make it sound good and is great for the lungs.

Add it up. Or subtract. Or multiply. Tackle math problems on paper or in your head for a greater challenge. School workbooks, available at any book store. Try the math word problems too.

Use paper and pen to keep a journal, write poetry, make grocery lists, or send letters to friends and family. Writing will stimulate a variety of senses, and can help you remember lists.

Use telephone apps and computer programs to play online games or communicate with distant friends. Make an effort to learn new apps or programs.

Spend time in the kitchen. Cooking is a top brain exercise for seniors, as it involves all five senses and often leads to socialization. Try new recipes you find online or in your cookbooks. Invite a partner to help you with the preparation.

Use your non-dominant hand for everyday tasks. Brush your hair or teeth with it. Use it for your computer mouse. Every time you ask your opposite hand to do something it hasn't done

for decades, you challenge the brain to make new connections. Try it. It's frustrating, but fun!

Create a gorgeous painting, or try to copy someone else's classic artwork.

A sketching that's fetching. Make a black-and-white pencil drawing of your grandchild, your favorite food, or an extravagant building.

Knit. Knitting is an excellent and soothing hobby. It provides mathematic and spatial challenges to the brain, uses several senses, and can be social. Knitting strengthens hand-to-eye coordination, finger movements, and development of patterns.

Sample new foods with your eyes closed and then try to identify the ingredients all the way down to the spices. Closing the eyes, forces us to rely on taste and smell even more, enhancing the experience.

Play traditional board games or cards with your friends or family members. Touching these items and moving game pieces provides for a multisensory experience that builds tactical and memory skills. Conversation stimulates the brain, too.

Care for a pet. Pets have a soothing effect on us, decreasing blood pressure, lowering heart rates and bringing a state of calm contentment that can improve blood flow to the brain. Caring for a pet also requires feeding, bathing, and giving it (and you!) exercise.

Garden. If gardening is among your favorite hobbies, good for you! It allows you to reap all the benefits from the sun and being outdoors; improves memory and organization skills; and can be a stress-relieving activity that leads to an improvement in mood and brain health. Remember your sunscreen.

Solve a puzzle. Jigsaw puzzles are challenging to the brain and a great social activity. Another good task is visual puzzles that ask you to find the differences between two pictures that seem identical, or finding Waldo (remember him?) in a complex drawing. These improve visual discrimination, so our eye can find what's important in all the chaos around us. We need this skill to be good drivers, so keep it strong.

Read. So simple yet so effective: Read a romance novel, a children's book, the news, an auto repair manual. Just read.



Berries benefit the brain

“Berry Fruit Enhances Beneficial Signaling in the Brain”
Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry

Strong scientific evidence exists that eating blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and other berry fruits has beneficial effects on the brain and may help prevent age-related memory loss and other changes, scientists report. The new article on the value of eating berry fruits appears in ACS' Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry. In the article, Barbara Shukitt-Hale, Ph.D., and Marshall G. Miller point out that longer lifespans are raising concerns about the human toll and health care costs of treating Alzheimer's disease and other forms of mental decline. They explain that recent research increasingly shows that eating berry fruits can benefit the aging brain.

To analyze the strength of the evidence about berry fruits, they extensively reviewed cellular, animal and human studies on the topic. Their review concluded that berry fruits help the brain stay healthy in several ways. Berry fruits contain high levels of antioxidants, compounds that protect cells from damage by harmful free radicals. The two also report that berry fruits change the way neurons in the brain communicate. These changes in signaling can prevent inflammation in the brain that contribute to neuronal damage and improve both motor control and cognition. Further research will show whether these benefits are a result of individual compounds shared between berry fruits or whether the unique combinations of chemicals in each berry fruit simply have similar effects.

Some studies in humans have shown that dietary supplementation with berries reduces inflammation in humans. Grapes and blueberries have also been shown to improve brain function in older adults with mild mental impairment.

