

7 Ways to Grow & Repair Your Brain

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Want a better brain? Want to prevent the common brain problems often seen in the elderly? We can not only prevent brain dysfunction, but correct it, and, actually grow our brains. It's not a dream, it's real. The first step is the most difficult – deciding you really want to do it. And, it's quite simple. Read on.

Not too long ago, even many cutting edge researchers and doctors thought it impossible to improve the brain like we do today. We now know that stimulating the brain through our senses – eyes, ears, touch, smell, taste – and just by thinking certain ways, will trigger new connections within the brain, and between the brain and body. It's even possible to grow new brain cells through these activities!

With the right mental activity, blood flow to the brain increases, bringing more oxygen and other nutrients to brain cells – the first step to better brain function. This phenomenal activity can happen often just by changing one simple habit.

Based on our work of measuring brain waves, developing new forms of biofeedback, and the educational programs we teach to doctors, lay people, and children, this article outlines an effective and practical way to improve your brain, beginning with the very first day!

The 7 ways include some routines you can develop slowly with regular practice, while others are simple lifestyle habits. The sooner you do this, the better – your brain is not getting any younger.

1. Finger Touching. Learning to type or play the piano are powerful brain exercises. Typing, the real format of touch-typing, not poking at keys with one or two fingers, is relatively easy to learn. There are many Internet sites, programs and booklets available. It involves using all your fingers. Learning the piano does essentially the same thing – you teach your brain to place your fingers on specific areas of the keyboard, guided by your brain.

Both touch-typing and playing the piano work both sides of the brain, with many sensory and motor brain regions stimulated. Too many of our daily activities activate only one part of the brain, leaving the less-dominant areas relatively inactive.

In addition to stimulating sensory areas of the brain via the fingers, both taste and smell are very powerful ways to improve brain function as well. Stimulate your taste and smell senses daily with different types and textures of food, spices, oils and other pleasant sensations. Paying attention to tastes and smells of each meal is important – something you can't do when you rush your meal. Avoid artificial and chemical tastes and smells. A food and/or wine tasting can be very therapeutic. Our sense of smell is especially powerful and is associated with the memory centers of the brain.

2. Music. Another powerful sensory stimulation is sound. For 5,000 years, the power of music and the brain – music therapy – has been well known. And all you need is ears! By hearing enjoyable music you increase healthy brain waves called alpha. The brain benefits are even better if you're relaxed with eyes closed. For an even better brain workout, listen to the different rhythms, instruments, or parts of the song. All these separate items, from just listening to picking out instruments, stimulate both the creative right side of the brain and the analytical left brain.

An easy-to-do music therapy is to sit back and relax, close your eyes (sending the brain into a healthy alpha state) and listen to the song Rosemary (go to www.philmaffetone.com) with headphones. The 5-Minute Power Break, described on my website, outlines this technique, which is a great daily workout.

3. Be Bilateral. From an early age we learn to be unilateral – we do things one-sided. The most common example is using our right hand for most things if we're right handed. Evaluate your habits and start using your opposite hand, and foot, for more activities. It will seem odd at first, but even performing this task once starts improving brain function. Be careful with things that can be dangerous such as shaving or using the opposite foot for the brakes while driving.

4. Routes. In your mind's eye, take a tour of a common route in your life – your drive to work, a jogging trail, your walk from the train to the office, etc. As you go through the chosen path, recall as many objects, smells, sounds and colors as possible. Visualizing routes pumps blood to the memory centers of the brain, feeding the cells there.

Many memory experts use routes to memorize large amounts of data. You could easily memorize something shorter – a poem, song or list of things using routes. Taking the same route as above, attach a key word or phrase of your song or list you want to memorize to objects you see along the way. Then, when you want to recall your song or list, think of each point of the route and the key words or phrase will come out of your memory.

5. Create Categories. Many brain functions are best accomplished by creating categories of information. This can help improve the speed of your thinking. As an example, suppose you had a long list of items to buy in the grocery store: red peppers, lettuce, summer squash, carrots, onions, tomatoes, zucchini, blueberries, beets and eggplant. Instead of writing a list, create a single mental category containing those different items. In this case, the category could be rainbow. Then, further categorize the list of fruits and vegetables into their respective colors: red (peppers, tomatoes, beets); purple (blueberries; eggplant), green (lettuce, zucchini), yellow (summer squash, onions), etc. Keep the number of items in one category to around 7 and no more than 10. Once those 7 bits of information are entered into the brain, it can be treated as one chunk. So instead of having to remember 7-10 things, you only have to remember one. Chunking is also very effective for helping memory recall and long-term memory.

Other categories can be created by asking yourself questions. As an exercise, for example, ask, what are five ways of using a ballpoint pen when the ink is gone? What are five things you can do with a shoe other than wear it? The more fun and challenging you make the questions and answers, the more you stimulate your brain.

6. Learn a New Language. While the optimal window of opportunity to learn language occurs before age 7, adults can still learn other languages. Pick one you've always wanted to speak. There are many booklets, tapes, and other learning tools available, and most likely you know someone who speaks another language who can help. Add one new word to your vocabulary each day, and use it in your daily life. Listen to "native" speakers through recordings or people you know. If you're learning Japanese, for example, go to your favorite sushi bar and speak with the chef, or if Italian, to your local Italian deli (they will love talking with you). Like everything else, have fun doing it. The non-Latin based languages may be best, including Japanese and Chinese, but any language works well for the brain.

7. Tell a Story. At least 7 major areas of the brain are activated during storytelling. Before the age of printing, people relied upon storytelling to pass on great works of poetry and sagas (the most famous examples are Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*). While memorizing stories and poems stimulate brain function, storytelling is even more creative and imaginative for brain development. Dream up some exciting stories, or use real life experiences if you aren't feeling creative, then put "twists" on the truth such that you have created fantasies that may be silly, romantic, or wildly unbelievable. Have a story-telling wine & cheese party, write down your tales, go to an open-mic and tell stories, or just talk to yourself. Even daydreaming your stories, like during one of those boring business meetings, will be great for your brain.

Other Better-Brain Habits. There are other powerful ways to improve brain health well worth a mention, so look for another article to follow. For now, here's another: Being in love is a very powerful stimulus for the brain. Studies that address longevity and healthy brain function show the importance of having a loving and stimulating partner. Contrary to many beliefs, a relationship should not be hard work – this actually reduces brain function. If you are laboring to get along with your partner, it may be time for a change.

Don't wait. Start improving your brain today! Just reading this article is a first step.

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