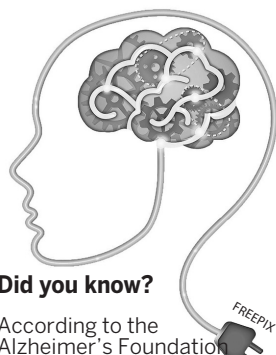


YOUR GOOD HEALTH

Four steps for a healthier, sharper brain



By Alissa Widman Neese
More Content Now

Want to give your mind a good workout?

Instead of bingeing on online brain games, it's probably best to focus on living an active, healthy lifestyle, according to neurologists.

Take a walk. Eat your vegetables. Socialize with friends.

Though it might seem surprising, the key to keeping your brain healthy and high-functioning as you age is adopting a holistic approach, not trying to spot-train your brain, said Dr. Geoff Eubank, OhioHealth's medical chief of general neurology.

"Common sense would tell you to work the thing you want to preserve," Eubank said. "But you really don't want to pick just one thing, you want to pick all of them to be as healthy as possible."

It's advice that has proven effective for Merlane Fuller, 64, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a neurodegenerative disorder, more than seven years ago. She participates in a "Delay the Disease" class that integrates robust workouts with voice exercises and even handwriting practice.

For Fuller, bonding with classmates has helped her stay social.

While curbing her physical symptoms, creating those friendships has made her feel healthier overall, she said.

"Now I'm socially connected with people who share my disease," she said. "That's really important to me."

Diet and exercise

Exercising and eating healthy are usually associated with building muscle

and trimming fat, but neurologists say it's about so much more.

Any physical activity — yoga, walking, running, biking — is mentally engaging, and vigorous exercise has even been compared to "Miracle-Gro for the brain" in recent studies, said David Zid, Delay the Disease program director.

The key is finding one you enjoy so you keep at it.

For foods, a colorful, plant-based diet that's low in saturated fats is best. Eating a well-balanced diet, rather than just a lot of one food that is marketed as brain-healthy, is important.

However, some research suggests that consuming fish one to two times a week could help reduce the onset of dementia, Eubank said.

Stay social

When you exercise and eat that healthy meal, it's best to do it surrounded by people.

A good discussion may be just as hearty of a brain workout because of the complexities of sharing stories, judging social cues and recalling memories, said Dr. Douglas Scharre, director of Wexner Medical Center's division of cognitive neurology.

Getting involved with volunteering, clubs and other groups as you age helps maintain a good social circle.

"I don't think people realize the amount of their brain they use just for day-to-day tasks like carrying on a conversation," Scharre said.

'Use it or lose it'

Doctors say there is no proof as of yet that playing so-called brain games, such as crossword and Sudoku puzzles and mind teasers on

Did you know?

According to the Alzheimer's Foundation of America, our brains need regular checkups, just as other parts of our bodies do. A memory screening is a quick, easy, non-invasive exam for our brains. Call the foundation for more info at 866-232-8484.

your cellphone or computer, have a better long-term impact on overall brain health than other cognitively engaging activities.

If you enjoy them, keep playing, they said. If you don't, don't start just because of how they're advertised.

Plenty of everyday activities — such as doing jigsaw puzzles, reading, learning a foreign language or playing piano — can build up your "brain reserves," providing a protective cushion as your brain deteriorates with age, Scharre said.

Even something as routine as filing taxes can keep your brain active.

It's often explained with the phrase "use it or lose it," Scharre said.

Avoid bad habits

In addition to practicing good habits, avoiding bad ones can ensure your brain thrives as you age, neurologists said.

Avoid smoking. Wear a helmet when bicycling or riding a motorcycle to avoid trauma.

And if you have sleep apnea, which decreases the brain's oxygen supply, potentially destroying brain cells, get tested and treated as early as possible.

Though you can't avoid being genetically predisposed to brain-related issues, lifestyle changes can only help, the doctors said.



Penn Yan

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Taking the time to care.

Primary Care. Dental.
Counseling. Family Planning.

*Everyone welcome.
Most insurances accepted.
Call 315-536-2752 for
an appointment today.*

Medical: 112 Kimball Ave., Penn Yan
Dental: 160 Main St., Penn Yan

Also located in:

BATH • GENEVA • SODUS
KING FERRY • NEWARK
PENN YAN • PORT BYRON
DUNDEE DENTAL CENTER

All part of Finger Lakes Community Health
www.localcommunityhealth.com



KEUKA COUNSELING
A Healing Journey

Serving All Ages of Individuals & Families Since 1987

Specializing In Healing Work For:

• Abuse & Trauma • Life Transitions • Grief & Loss
*Unique Sand Tray Therapy Experience Available
to All Clients*

By Appointment Only

215 Main St., Suites 3 & 5
Penn Yan
(315) 536-7329

Edith Kerby Mann, L.C.S.W.
Counselor
Sand Tray Therapist

Call

315-536-4422

**if you would like
to advertise on the
Your Good Health
page**