



# Practice Healthy-Brain Habits

## CHALLENGE

Keep your brain actively daily

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Practice Healthy-Brain Habits."
2. Choose activities to keep your brain activity daily
3. Keep a record of your completed health challenge in case your organization requires documentation.



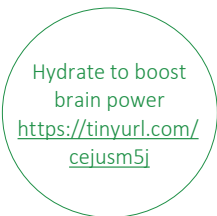
Use it or lose it. Baseball trivia, fun facts, or important phone numbers. They won't stay in your memory bank forever. So how do you hang on to that stuff? And how do you keep your brain healthy?

Give your brain a workout. That's how.

Ever lost your keys? Walked into a room and forgot why you were there? Missed an important meeting because it slipped your mind? Healthy brain habits can help with that, too.

If you've ever felt like your memory was slipping, you're not alone. Brain function is always in flux. A number of factors influence memory, like:

- Your age and overall health
- Drinking enough water
- Eating healthy foods
- Getting good sleep
- Feeling connected with others
- Being physically active
- Keeping your mind engaged



Giving your brain what it needs can improve your memory, recall speed, problem-solving skills, and attention span. It can even help prevent age-related brain diseases. Take the month-long Health Challenge and Practice Healthy-Brain Habits.

## Quiz: Healthy Brain or Brain Drain?

How much do you know about healthy brain habits? Take the quiz to find out.



### T F

1.   Less than 8 hours of sleep a day can limit your brain's ability to store and recall information.
2.   Exercise at any age improves brain function and memory recall.
3.   If you are obese, your risk for developing dementia is 80 percent higher than a healthy weight person.
4.   Solving crossword puzzles, Sudoku puzzles, and games of strategy helps maintain brain function.
5.   Your mood and response times needed for decision making and memory recall are improved when you drink enough water.

Check your answers., How did you do? Your brain works best when you challenge your brain to store and recall information and memories. Proper nutrition, hydration, sleep, and exercise help, too. Healthy habits also help prevent dementia and brain diseases.

Answers: 1.True, 2.True, 3.True, 4.True, 5.True.

## Nurture Your Noggin: 6 Habits for a Healthy Brain

Before birth your brain starts to form links that help you store and recall things. About 100 billion neurons process 70,000 thoughts, decisions, and ideas a day.

And it takes a lot of energy. Your brain uses about 25 percent of your body's energy and oxygen supply. And just like the rest of your body, your brain needs its own regimen of nutrition and exercise.

Practice these six healthy habits to boost your brain power:

### 1. Drink More Water

Your brain is about 75 percent water. A thirsty brain can't recall or focus very well. Motivation lags. Research shows that memory, thinking, and mood improve when the brain and body are well hydrated.<sup>1</sup> Drinking plenty of water may also help reduce depression, and confusion.

- Drink a glass of water when you wake up
- Carry a water bottle with you during the day
- Aim to drink at least 40 to 64 ounces of water a day. More in hot weather or if you're highly active.

# Nurture Your Noggin: 6 Habits for a Healthy Brain (Continued)

## 2. Eat Brain-Healthy Foods

More than 6 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease. This brain-wasting disease breaks the links between nerve cells. Over time, it causes memory loss and thinking problems. While genes may be a factor, researchers believe dietary habits may hold clues to prevent it.



A recent study found that those with the healthiest brains have better diets than those with diagnosed brain and memory problems.<sup>2</sup>

They eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and other plant-based foods. Examples of brain-healthy eating include The DASH Diet and Mediterranean Diet.

- Eat more plant-based foods like broccoli, spinach, and dark-colored berries and other fruits and vegetables.
- Eat more whole-grain foods like pasta, cereal, and oats.
- Avoid or limit red meats, fried food, and processed foods.

## 3. Get Your Zzzs

If you don't get enough sleep, you'll probably feel groggy and tired. It's also bad for your brain.



One recent study found that people who don't get enough sleep or sleep too much are more likely to develop age-related memory problems.<sup>3</sup> Researchers also found that too much sleep can have a similar effect.

**The sweet spot:** At least 5.5 hours and no more than 7.5 hours of sleep per night, according to the study. And if you come up short, a nap can help.

Over time, lack of sleep also makes the cells in the body less responsive to insulin. This raises the risk for diabetes and high blood pressure. Both of these problems can damage the brain.

When your brain is short on sleep, is it less able to store memories. And it doesn't get rid of toxins linked to certain brain diseases.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Be Social

You and your brain are better off in more ways than one when you're around family and friends.



Research shows that people who have good friendships and social ties are less likely to develop brain diseases as they age. People who are lonely without close social ties are 50 percent more likely to develop dementia.<sup>5</sup>

Positive social contact helps reduce stress hormones in the brain. And it helps improve memory, learning, judgment, language, and intuition.

- Make time to be social.
- Connect with family and friends.
- Use technology tools to stay connected.
- Participate in group activities.

## 5. Sit Less, Move More

When you're active, your brain releases endorphins that enhance mood and reduce pain. Studies show that exercise also helps people feel less stressed, anxious, or depressed.



Being active can also be a good way to boost self-esteem, improve sleep, and aid in weight loss.<sup>6</sup>

- Take a walk during your break.
- Go to the gym over lunch or after work.
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Look for ways to be more active.
- Aim to exercise at least 30 to 60 minutes a day.

## 6. Practice Problem Solving

Solve a crossword. Complete a Sudoku puzzle. Play a game of chess, checkers or other game of strategy. When you

keep your mind engaged by thinking and solving problems, your brain benefits.

Research shows that people are at lower risk of memory loss when they play games that make them think.



- One recent study found that reading, playing games like checkers and puzzles, and writing letters, can delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease by 5 years among older adults.<sup>7</sup>

Why? Learning and problem solving makes the neuron connections in the brain less vulnerable to damage.

- Play games of strategy.
- Learn a new skill or take a class.
- Engage in activities that require you to solve problems.

When you take care of your brain, you'll be able to think faster, have better focus and attention, and remember more.



## References

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4. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2019). Sleep deprivation and deficiency. From: <https://tinyurl.com/y7xz37x4>
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7. Wilson, R., et al. (2021). Cognitive activity and onset age of incident Alzheimer disease dementia. *Neurology*, 97(9). From: <https://tinyurl.com/yc6eunta>



# Practice Healthy-Brain Habits

**CHALLENGE**  
Keep your brain active daily

### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, or add to your digital calendar).
2. Make choices to keep your brain active daily.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to practice healthy-brain habits.
4. Review your progress at the end of each day, each week, and at the end of the month. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge™	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____		
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I made healthy-brain choices  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I exercised at least 30 minutes

### Other wellness projects completed this month:

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 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_