

20 Ways to Keep your Mind in Great Shape

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We all know that exercise is good for the body – did you ever think about exercising your brain? Studies suggest that there are several keys to aging well cognitively. These include developing healthy lifestyles, keeping intellectually active, staying socially integrated and reducing stress. There are many ways to achieve these goals, but here are 20 ideas.

1. **Add color to your diet** – eat a diet rich in colorful fruits and vegetables. The antioxidants in these foods protect brain cells and help prevent cholesterol from building up in your arteries, including the ones that direct blood flow to the brain.
2. **Exercise** – physical activity is linked with slower mental decline. Exercise increases blood flow to all parts of your body including the brain. So get off the couch and walk the dog.
3. **Reduce your stress** – chronic stress can damage brain cells.
4. **Drink alcohol in moderation**, if at all – some research shows that small amounts of alcohol may prevent memory loss. But heavy alcohol users are more at risk for developing memory problems and dementia.
5. **Stop smoking** – smokers may have twice the risk of getting Alzheimer’s disease.
6. **Protect your head when exercising** – head trauma increases your risk of developing memory problems.
7. **Check your medications** – many medications can have side effects of memory impairment.
8. **Check your thyroid** – low levels of thyroid can cause mental slowing and depression.
9. **Sleep** – chronic sleep deprivation impedes your memory. Try sleeping longer at night and take a 20 minute nap if possible.
10. **Learn** a new word every day.
11. **Play a video game** – No matter what we are telling our children, mastering the rules of the game as well as developing hand-eye coordination boosts different areas of the brain
12. **Play board games and do puzzles** – they activate strategic, spatial and memory parts of the brain.
13. **Learn a new language** – this boosts verbal, language and memory parts of the brain.
14. **Socialize** – helps stave off memory draining depression and meeting new people forces new neural connections. Why not try a book club?
15. **Play an instrument** – learning to play a new instrument or mastering an old one has been associated with lower dementia risk.
16. **Dance** – learning new dance moves activates motor brain centers. It is also a stress reducing type of exercise and is often social.
17. **Read** the news and engage in good debates.
18. **Travel** to new places.
19. **Work** – even if you have retired from your full-time job, consider volunteering.
20. **Pay attention to sensory experiences** – one the most common cause of poor memory relates to failures to register the initial experience.