

Monthly Health Challenge™

# Give Your Brain a Workout



## CHALLENGE

Develop habits to keep your brain healthy

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Give Your Brain a Workout."
2. Create your own plan to develop habits to keep your brain healthy.
3. Keep up this habit for a lifetime of good health.



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:

- ✓ 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 *Give Your Brain a Workout*.

Ready to give your brain a workout? Take this quiz to find out how much you know about healthy brain habits.

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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 make it your habit to challenge it to store and recall information and memories. Proper nutrition, hydration, sleep, and exercise can all help. Your daily habits also help keep your brain healthy and active and prevent dementia and brain diseases.

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

## Workouts to Build a Better 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. But that 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.

- Carry a water bottle with you
- Aim to drink 40 to 64 ounces of water a day.

Health benefits of drinking water  
[tinyurl.com/y4daszfp](http://tinyurl.com/y4daszfp)

## 2. Munch More Brain Food

More than 5 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, nuts, legumes, fish, and lean meats. Researchers also found that diets high in trans fats caused the brain to shrink and caused memory loss.

- Eat more plant-based foods like broccoli, spinach, and dark-colored berries.
- Add more walnuts, almonds, and fish to your diet.
- If you're a vegetarian, take a vitamin B12 supplement to improve brain function.
- And avoid foods high in trans fats like fried foods; powdered mixes for cakes, brownies, and waffles; packaged cookies; biscuits; frozen or creamy drinks; and pre-made pie crust.

**Go shopping:**  
Stock up on  
healthy brain foods  
[tinyurl.com/  
pfsp02t](https://tinyurl.com/pfsp02t)



## 3. Get Your Zzzs

If you don't get enough sleep, you'll probably feel groggy and tired. And your reaction times may be slowed. In fact, one out of eight injury-related crashes is caused by drowsy driving.<sup>3</sup>

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

- Aim to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night.

## 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.<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.
- Participate in group activities

## 5. Be More Active

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.

10 ways  
to make  
exercise a  
daily habit  
[tinyurl.com/  
abha7c8](https://tinyurl.com/abha7c8)

## 6. Practice Problem Solving

Solve a crossword. Complete a Sudoku puzzle. Play a game of chess 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. Problem solving makes the neuron connections 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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# Give Your Brain a Workout



## CHALLENGE

Develop habits to keep your brain healthy

### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Create your own plan to develop healthy habits to keep your brain healthy.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to develop healthy habits.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you practice healthy brain habits. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete this challenge. 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 time to keep my brain healthy

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I was physically active for at least 30 minutes

### Other wellness projects completed this month:

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



[NebraskaBlue.com/Wellness](https://NebraskaBlue.com/Wellness)

