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Exercise Benefits Your Brain

One way to improve your memory is to lace up your walking shoes and get moving. Regular moderate exercise is associated with a host of medical benefits. Researchers continue to learn more about how a healthy body is also an indicator of a healthy brain. Benefits include improved memory and cognition, and possibly a decreased risk of developing dementia.

When you exercise, your heart rate increases, which pumps more oxygen to the brain. Aerobic exercise also helps repair damaged brain cells, and it has an antidepressant effect on your mind.

The best workouts for brain health are those that require coordination, rhythm, and strategy, such as dancing. If you exercise first thing in the morning, you get a spike in brain activity that helps prepare you for mental stresses the rest of the day. If you feel mentally exhausted at any time, take a walking break or do some type of physical activity to reboot your mind and body.

Chronic health problems that impact heart health will also take a toll on your brain. It is important to treat and manage conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes, not only for your heart, but also for your brain. Stress, depression, and anxiety will also speed aging of the brain if left untreated.

A healthful diet is important in addressing nearly all chronic illnesses, and a diet low in fat and rich in fruits and vegetables will ultimately help your brain. Studies have also linked a lack of sleep with problems in memory, thinking, and decision making, and smoking increases your risk of brain decline.

You should also exercise your brain by continually learning, and

challenge your brain by solving a puzzle, creating art, building something, or playing a game that requires strategic thinking. An active social life is positive for your brain as well, so stay connected with others.



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Squats to Strengthen

Squats are one of the best exercises you can do to strengthen your lower body. They are great for strengthening your legs and glutes, and they also strengthen your core. When you do these properly, they also improve knee stability, promote mobility, and improve balance. The squat is a somewhat complicated movement and it is so beneficial because it forces the body's parts to work and grow stronger together as a single unit. It is one of the best functional exercises out there!

This is how to do squats:

1. Stand with your feet just over shoulder-width apart.
2. Keep your back in a neutral position, and keep your knees centered over your feet.
3. Slowly bend your knees, hips, and ankles, lowering until you reach a 90-degree angle.
4. Return to your starting position.

For a demonstration on doing squats go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDu8MMr6_hU&feature=youtu.be

[hU&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDu8MMr6_hU&feature=youtu.be)

Demonstration of squats with a dumbbell:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4LOVMnRapA&feature=youtu.be>



The Sweet Stuff

While dietary guidelines have always encouraged you to limit added sugars in your diet, the 2015 revision of these guidelines is specific, saying that added sugar should make up only 10 percent of your daily calories.

General guidelines are based on Americans eating approximately 2,000 calories per day, so 10 percent of that amount would equal about 50 grams of sugar. To put things in perspective, drinking more than one 12-ounce can of soda would max out your limit. The American Heart Association recommends about half that amount. The reason for these limits is that studies show a diet with a lot of sugar increases your risk for developing heart disease, and it can lead to obesity and diseases associated with obesity including type 2 diabetes and cancer. It is important to note that the limit applies specifically to added sugars, and not those occurring naturally in foods such as fruits and milk.

For many Americans, this is a significant change because many people are used to consuming up to 22 teaspoons of added sugar a day. To meet

the new 10 percent of calories requirement, most people would need to cut added sugars in the diet by nearly half, or no more than 12 teaspoons a day.

Before you can reduce added sugars in your diet, you need to find them. It is not always easy to find added sugars in the nutrition facts panel on products because the line for "sugars" includes both added and natural sugars. Foods with natural sugars include fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose). The ingredient label on processed foods will tell you if added sugars are in the product. Look for these names of added sugars on labels: brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, malt sugar, raw sugar, honey, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrates, molasses, sugar, syrup, and sugar molecules ending in "ose" (dextrose, glucose, sucrose, etc.).



Extracting the Sweet Tooth

There are simple things you can do to start reducing the added sugars in foods you eat and provide for your family. Here are some tips:

- » Start with beverages. Drink more water or unsweetened tea. Buy sugar-free or low-calorie beverages. Always choose water or a sugar-free beverage with a meal.
- » Remove sugar, syrup, and honey from the table so it is out of sight.
- » Add fresh fruit to cereal or oatmeal instead of sugar.
- » Avoid canned fruit packed in syrup or heavy syrup. Choose those canned in water or natural juice.
- » When baking cookies, brownies, or cakes, cut sugar in the recipe by $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$.
- » Use spices to enhance foods, rather than sugar. Try ginger, allspice, cinnamon, or nutmeg. You can also use extracts instead of sugar, such as almond, vanilla, orange, or lemon.
- » Substitute equal amounts of unsweetened applesauce for sugar in recipes.
- » Use sugar substitutes in moderation.

If you are one that likes to have a dessert at the end of a meal, a good habit to adopt is serving fruit for dessert rather than high-calorie, high-fat, and high-sugar foods. The recipe below is a good example.

Strawberry Meringue with Chocolate Shavings

Serves 8

Ingredients:

2 cups sliced fresh strawberries
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar, divided
4 large egg whites, at room temperature
Dash of cream of tartar
Dash of salt
2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons shaved good-quality dark chocolate

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 250°F. Cover a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the egg whites, cream of tartar, and salt, and beat with an electric mixer at medium speed for about 1 minute, until the eggs are frothy. With the mixer at high speed, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, beating for 5 to 7 minutes, until stiff, glossy peaks form.
3. Drop the meringue onto the prepared baking sheet in eight 3- to 4-inch diameter rounds, smoothing the edges. Bake for 1 hour. Turn the oven off, but leave the meringues in overnight or for about 12 hours. Do not open the oven door. If the meringues will not be served immediately, remove them from the oven and store in a tightly covered dry container until ready to serve.

4. In a bowl, mix the strawberries with the remaining 1 tablespoon of sugar. Refrigerate the strawberries until ready to use.
5. When ready to serve, gently peel the meringues off the parchment paper. Top each meringue with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup strawberries and garnish with 1 teaspoon shaved chocolate, and serve.

Nutrition Information for 1 servings:

68 calories
1 g fat
13 g carbohydrates
2 g protein
1 g fiber
65 mg sodium

Recipe reprinted with permission from the American Institute for Cancer Research, www.aicr.org

