

Brain Awareness: Use It or Lose It

The brain's capacity is enormous, yet many scientists suggest that we only use a small percentage of our brain. What are you doing to maximize your brain's potential?

Brain Functions

Your brain helps you analyze sensory data, remember information, learn new information, create thoughts and make decisions.

It is divided into halves called cerebral hemispheres and each hemisphere is further divided into four lobes: frontal, parietal, temporal and occipital. Each lobe has its own responsibilities. The frontal lobe is responsible for cognition and memory. The parietal lobe processes sensations related to touch. Visual perception is controlled by the occipital lobe. The temporal lobe is responsible for auditory senses.

The brain, like many other organs, ages. The aging brain is responsible for a decline in memory, decision-making ability and verbal skills.

Exercise Your Brain

There are many ways that you can delay the aging of your brain:

- *Exercise your mind*—Challenge your brain daily by making note of last week's activities, working on crossword puzzles,

trying a new hobby or reading more books.

- *Exercise your body*—Physical exercise reduces depression and other cardiovascular risks. It also produces a euphoric state by releasing endorphins. Enjoy physical activity daily; take the stairs rather than elevator at work, park in the back of the parking lot or take a brisk 10-minute walk during lunch.
- *Eat healthy*—Like your body, your brain has certain dietary requirements. Proteins and foods high in unsaturated fats help with brain development. Eating foods low in cholesterol and saturated fats, in addition to eating breakfast daily, can jump-start your brain. Also, protect your brain with antioxidant vitamins E and C.
- *Focus on safety*—Wear protective head gear when enjoying physical activities like riding a bike or snowboarding. Wear a seat belt to protect your head from trauma in case of a car accident.
- *Get plenty of sleep*—Lack of sleep leads to mental fatigue and loss of memory. Try to get seven to nine hours of sleep

each night. During sleep, the brain repairs itself, collects the day's events and files everything into memory.

- *Reduce stress*—Stress can lead to memory loss. High stress releases cortisol in the brain, which absorbs the brain's primary food source, glucose. Reduce stress with exercise, meditation or a quiet activity you enjoy.
- *Quit smoking and refrain from illegal drug use*—Research shows that smoking can lead to mental decline; drugs such as ecstasy and marijuana can result in mental deterioration.
- *Listen to music*—Research shows that music is good for the brain, specifically baroque music, which can reduce stress.



Did You Know...?

Research suggests that eating a healthful diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables not only helps you stay slim and lowers your risk for heart disease, but also preserves memory, boosts alertness and may even prevent Alzheimer's disease.