

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Brain Fitness is Puzzling

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



Is mental deterioration what we should all expect as a part of the aging process? Are we destined to lose our “mental edge” as we get on in years? The answer to these questions is a resounding no. Much as we are able to preserve ourselves physically through exercise, the brain and its functions are likewise preserved and even enhanced by challenging mental activity. Scientific research is now revealing that we can build brainpower simply by engaging in regular “mental calisthenics.” Activities like mental puzzles, learning a new skill or craft, or practicing a musical instrument go a long way towards the goal of getting the brain back in shape and even staving off Alzheimer’s disease. Just like your body, your brain gets slow and flabby when it’s not put through its paces on a regular basis. So, spending a lot of time in front of the television ends up setting the stage for mental deterioration while engaging in intellectual activities leads to a sharper mind that is resistant to the effects of aging.

Mental exercises, much like physical activities, should be performed on a regular basis to be most beneficial. In addition, it’s important that these activities become more challenging with time. For example, if you regularly engage in working on puzzles, be sure to push yourself to complete puzzles that are more demanding as you become more adept at working them out.

Exposing yourself to challenging mental activities like puzzle solving is good for you no matter what level of academic achievement you’ve attained. Brain exercises are good for everyone, even those who feel that they’ve come to a point in their lives when new learning is no longer possible.

Americans spend billions of dollars on gym memberships, exercise equipment, and instructional aids including personal trainers, books, and videos in an effort to maintain physical health. Yet we devote precious little of our resources to maintaining (not to mention enhancing) our mental capabilities. The good news is that brain fitness isn’t expensive and doesn’t demand any fancy equipment or coaching. It just requires commitment.

So make the commitment today that will last a lifetime. Set aside a few minutes each day to give your brain a workout. In the long run you will be rewarded.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".

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