

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Smile Your Way to Brain Health

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



There are many upsides to smiling (pun intended)! Comedienne Phyllis Diller once said, “A smile is a curve that sets everything straight.” We’ve also all heard the expression that “the world looks brighter from behind a smile.” Beyond the fact that this simple act makes us feel good, smiling actually plays an important role in several key functions of the brain. Smiling activates brain circuits that enhance positive social interaction and also allows us to more fully experience empathy and express compassion. This leads to a reduction in stress, known to be damaging to the brain.

Researchers have determined that when humans experience stress, our adrenal glands produce excessive amounts of the hormone cortisol. An excess of cortisol is specifically damaging to the area of the brain that processes information and stores it as memory. Ultimately, this is why stress is bad for memory and also explains the relationship between stress and increased risk for Alzheimer’s disease.

So how can you reduce your body’s production of this brain-damaging chemical? New research directly links smiling to lower levels of cortisol. Think of it...the simple act of putting a smile on your face can have a very positive effect on your brain health and may actually go a long way towards preserving your memory!

My advice for this issue is simple – just smile. And you can take that at face value!

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

“If you smile when no one else is around, you really mean it.”
— Andy Rooney