

I have spent quite a bit of time writing about how to keep your body healthy and various ailments of the bone, joint and muscle. Lately, I started thinking it's wonderful to have your body working well, but it doesn't do as much good if your mind didn't fair as well. What I mean is, your body may be ready for the walk but it won't go well if you can't find the door.

If we can eat right and exercise to prevent the passage of time from taking such a toll on our bodies, can we do the same for our brains? In a word, yes. The results don't come in a tangible form like a skinnier head but you might get a stronger brain. To stave off the effects of time and even make your brain sharper try doing mental tasks that challenge you every day. Suggestions are sudoku, crossword puzzles, chess and brainteasers. All of these are great to exercise your mind as long as they are a **unique** activity. As we practice any activity like this we get better at it and after a while it is comforting but not challenging. We get so that we are going through the motions. At this point it is better to switch brain exercises. For the brain exercise to work it should be "novel and complex", according to Paul D. Nussbaum, Ph.D., neuropsychologist and chair of the Prevention Advisory Board for the Alzheimer's Foundation of America.

After you exercise your brain you will need to feed it properly. You need more fat! No, not another trip to the fast food drive through. You need Omega – 3 fatty acids. This means fish oil or other sources of un-denatured unsaturated fats, like raw nuts or avocados. The brain is approximately 60% fat and will need these goods fats for upkeep. All those overheated, saturated fats in the bacon, double cheeseburger are not making you thinner or smarter. Also, a good dose of antioxidants from fruits and vegetables helps reduce the harm of age and a poor diet.

Exercise your body to help your brain. About 25% of your blood supply goes directly to the brain. If you do aerobic exercise consistently you will make sure that your body is powering your brain with oxygen and glucose rich blood. The part of the brain that is the center for memory is especially sensitive to oxygen deprivation. Studies have shown that physical exercise can promote the growth of new brain cells in this area, and oxygen deprivation can damage this area.

Don't get stressed. Stress can be harmful to brain. Depressing and shocking events can damage to the memory the way that lack of oxygen can. Though it is not possible to limit much of our stress we can take time every day to meditate, pray or do deep breathing exercises. A little vacation for our minds every day away from the stressful thoughts decreases the damage. This is where a hobby is very helpful to distract you and give your brain a rest so it will perform better when you need it.

Last, but certainly not least, be a social butterfly. Studies have demonstrated that older adults that stay active with friends and family members have sharper minds. Quite often as we age in this country we are isolated from family members and friends don't stay in touch or pass away. We need to fight for those old connections and make new ones whenever we can. I usually encourage geriatric patients to make some younger friends. Most older folks have friends their own age, but these friends may pass away or lose the

ability to get out and visit. Younger friends will not only keep you moving faster but likely challenge your brain with “novel” ideas. For younger patients needing to find a way to decrease stress sit down with an older friend and listen to some experienced thoughts.

If you follow these tips you may not only find the door for your walk you may even find your way back home when you are through.