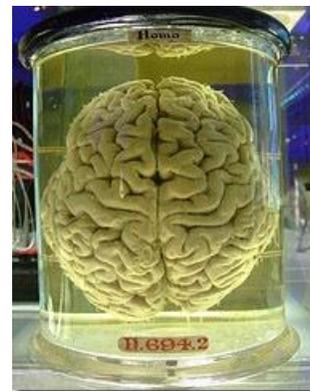


20 Ways To Train Your Brain For Peak Performance

In order to stay sharp, it is important that you exercise your brain. The less we use our minds, the duller they become. There is a lot of emphasis these days on staying physically healthy, but we should also be concerned for our mental well-being. Our brains continue to expand and adapt to the stimuli they receive throughout our lives. The more we take care of our brains, the better thinkers we become. Here are twenty ways that you can develop a training regimen for your brain!



1. Read a good book.

Reading a book stimulates the imagination. Your brain can't keep from drawing mental pictures when you read. Reading gets your mind off its butt and to work. I love to let a book carry me away. I always have a book that I'm reading and sometimes I have 3 or 4! I get most of my books from the library to avoid the cost of buying each one. This also allows me to try a wide variety of books without risk.

2. Big Brain Academy.

Video games have a bad reputation for causing brain rot, but there are some that will actually help you strengthen your mind. I like Big Brain Academy for the Wii. It is a collection of brain teasers that tests your mental acuity. The tests are entertaining and addicting. You can even compete with others which makes for some great family fun.

3. Practice meditation.

Don't worry, I'm not going off the new age deep-end here. There are a lot of different forms of meditation. To me, in its most simple form, meditation is about spending a little time alone to relax and center your thoughts. It is amazingly therapeutic. If you haven't tried meditation before, I would highly recommend reading this guide to meditation.

4. Get plenty of rest.

A lack of sleep can interfere with your ability to assimilate new information. This means those all-nighters you pulled back in college were much less effective than you thought. Your brain needs rest to operate at its peak performance. This may be why things always seem clearer and brighter after a good night's sleep.

5. Exercise regularly.

You didn't think you were going to get away without a little time on the treadmill did you? Cardiovascular exercise improves blood flow to the brain which improves brain functioning. One study found that physical exercise actually helped to increase the volume of the brain. So, if you want a bigger, better brain, then get to exercising!

6. Eat a good breakfast.

It is not a myth. Eating a good breakfast does get you off to a better start. You should eat a breakfast high in protein and good carbohydrates. A couple of pieces of whole-grain toast with peanut butter will fit the bill. Eggs are also an excellent source of protein. Nuts, milk, and fresh fruit are also great ways to feed your brain.

7. Think positive thoughts.

Encourage yourself. I am convinced that positive thinking increases the effectiveness of the brain and helps to avoid things like depression. I like to say that your brain works much like a computer, garbage-in, garbage-out. Find positive, encouraging people to hang around, read material that jazzes you up, do whatever it is that makes you feel good about yourself. These things will also help you be more mentally productive.

8. Be a continual learner.

Never stop being curious about your world. Seek out new experiences, skills, and knowledge. Think of something that you've always wanted to learn to do and then get started. A now famous study, showed that certain areas of the brains of London cab drivers were more developed compared to the average citizen. This was due to their need to learn how to navigate the maze of downtown streets. We can use this technique of challenging our brains to improve our abilities.

9. Lay off the alcohol.

Alcohol is of course a depressant. It slows down mental functions. The effects of alcohol on a person's cognitive ability is well-documented. If you need peak mental performance, then stop drinking alcohol. In addition to its obvious effects, it also decreases the restfulness of one's sleep which, as we have already discussed, impedes your ability to think clearly.

10. Get romantic (especially if you're a woman).

Studies have shown that there may be a link between regular sex and improved brain performance in women. Love-making increases a woman's estrogen levels and higher estrogen levels are tied to better mental performance. Of course, the mental benefits probably do not outweigh the risks, unless you are in a faithful, monogamous relationship.

11. Break your routines.

Drive a new way to work. Try writing with your less dominant hand. Mix things up a little. This perks up your brain because it requires you to think more. You aren't just running on auto-pilot. Challenge your brain by getting out of your routines and it will respond. This is a great way to get your mental juices flowing.

12. Stop watching so much television.

Researchers have found that too much television between the ages of 1 and 3 leads to attention problems later in childhood. Let's face it, TV is mind-numbing. Get up off the couch and away from the television. Sure, there is some good educational stuff for children and adults, but the average American watches way too much TV. If you want peak mental performance, then turn off the boob tube.

13. Work with numbers.

Do math problems in your head instead of on a calculator. For many of us, it is use it or lose it. We have become mentally lazy. We rely on our gadgets instead of thinking for ourselves. Working with and memorizing numbers is a great way to get your brain back in shape. This could pay off big dividends down the road!

14. Stop relying on your GPS to tell you where to go.

Remember the cab drivers in #8 above? Using your brain to figure out how to get from Point A to Point B is good mental exercise. You have to use your brain's ability to determine spatial relationships to effectively read a map and navigate a city. Traveling in an unfamiliar area is even better!

15. Recall old memories.

Get out those old picture albums and start thumbing through them. This taps into your brain's memory banks. Pictures will help you recall things that you thought you forgot. Dig deep to see just what all you remember. If you have other ways to stimulate your memory, like old letters or home movies, then by all means use those too.

16. Make beautiful music.

Learning to play a musical instrument is a great way to super-charge your brain. It requires a number of different parts of your brain to work together to make the melodies that you desire. Of course, if you are already a musician, then learn a new piece. Push yourself to learn new techniques. Music is a great workout for the mind.

17. Speak a new tongue.

Many people agree that learning to speak a new language is a powerful way to give the mind a stretch. If you've ever tried to learn even a few new words, then you know this can be difficult. Of course, the harder something is for the brain, the better! You have so much more mental capacity than you might imagine. Give it a try!

18. Memorize a song.

Many of us have lots of old songs stored in our heads, but why not expand your memory by learning a few new tunes? It may take awhile at first, but if you keep at it, you will find it gets easier. This is your brain getting back in shape.

19. Walk around the house blindfolded.

It might seem like a strange activity, but your brain can handle it. Once you try it a few times, you will probably find it fun and challenging. Again, this one draws on your memory, motor skills, and reasoning abilities. What a workout!

20. Expand your vocabulary.

Decide to learn one new word a day. There are several websites out there that can help you with this endeavor. You'll not only be expanding your mind, but you'll also be able to impress your friends and co-workers when you work one of your new words into a conversation.

Get started today and be smarter tomorrow!

There you have it! I have just given you 20 very practical ways to sharpen your mind. These suggestions will have your brain back in tip-top shape in no time. Why are you waiting? It is time to start exercising your mental muscles!

How do you keep your brain in perfect working order?

Photo by Gaetan Lee Contributing Author: Jeff