

Secrets for Keeping Your Mental Edge

Most of us give little thought to the intricate workings of our brains until we have an unsettling experience like forgetting the name that goes with a familiar face or struggling to remember a regularly used phone number.

Although these memory lapses are alarming, they don't have to be an inevitable part of aging. There are simple steps you can take to maintain and even improve brain function, no matter what your age.

Banish the mystery behind your memory

The first of these steps is to remove the mystery and overall misunderstanding surrounding memory itself. I believe that this has a great deal to do with the false perception that supporting a sharp mind, even as we age, is out of our control.

It's important to realize that most memory lapses in the 50+ age group result from what the National Institute of Mental Health have termed "age-associated memory impairment." But don't worry. This is a reflection on the overall wellness of people in this age category and is something you can absolutely influence.

Your mental fitness is closely tied to the health of other organs and systems in your body. Your hormones, heart, blood vessels, and immune system all have a tremendous influence on brain function. And the things you do to improve your cardiovascular health, muscle strength, and overall health will also help improve your cognitive function.

And so it stands to reason that the other important steps for keeping your brain razor sharp are the very things I recommend for lifelong good health—eat well, take targeted nutritional supplements, and exercise regularly.

Eat brain-healthy foods

A diet emphasizing lean sources of protein, healthy fats, nutrient-dense vegetables, fruits, and legumes is not only the foundation of good health, but also a boon for your brain power.

Specific "brain foods" to consider are citrus fruits and leafy greens, which supply potent antioxidants; nuts and seeds for their impressive fatty acid profile; as well as **flaxseed** and cold-water fish, such as sardines, salmon, and **tuna**, for their high omega-3 content.

Support brain function with targeted supplements

Although eating brain-healthy foods is a good start, diet alone can't provide adequate levels of the nutrients you need for top mental functioning. Therefore, I strongly recommend you take a high-potency daily vitamin and mineral **supplement** with therapeutic doses of B-complex vitamins, vitamins C and E, magnesium, and zinc.

Studies have shown that these essential nutrients can enhance energy production in the brain, support neurotransmitter development, promote proper oxygen delivery to the brain, and fight free radicals, which are all important for memory, clarity of thought, and mental energy.

Other "smart nutrients" I recommend are:

- **Essential fatty acids** (at least 320 mg of DHA and 320 mg of EPA per day), which are critical for intercellular communication
- Alpha-GPC (250 mg per day), which is a readily bioavailable source of choline and a crucial nutrient for optimal cognitive functioning

- Acetyl L-carnitine (500–1,500 mg per day in divided doses), which helps improve communication among neurons and helps maintain the protective myelin sheaths around your nerves
- Phosphatidylserine (100–200 mg per day), which helps support brain cell structure and has been shown to boost mental function
- DMAE (40 mg per day), which supports the production of neurotransmitters responsible for learning and memory
- Vinpocetine (10 mg daily), a nontoxic herbal extract from the periwinkle plant that protects neurons and improves oxygen utilization in the brain
- *Ginkgo biloba* (60 mg, twice daily with meals), which promotes normal blood flow to the brain

Work out your brain with mental exercise

A final step you can take to keep in tip-top mental shape is to exercise your mind. Just as you need to exercise your muscles to keep them strong and toned, you need to challenge your brain cells to keep them functioning at their best. Using your brain stimulates neural pathways, building new connections between neurons and reinforcing existing ones. By far my favorite “brain workout” is Sudoku. Other good brain teasers include listening to music, reading, taking classes, playing games, doing crossword puzzles, memorizing poetry, or mastering a new hobby.

Don’t forget to keep up with your regular physical exercise, too. It supports virtually every system in your body and increases oxygen and glucose availability to your brain. It also helps you maintain normal blood pressure and promotes optimal cognitive function.

Following these straightforward steps will allow you to stop worrying about your mental clarity and start living life to its fullest.

Yours in good health,

Julian Whitaker, MD