

BETter Living ...

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Keys to Embracing Aging – Brain Activity

No matter what we do, we depend on our brain to help us complete tasks, respond in conversations, help us make decisions, and many more things. Brain health truly effects our whole body and is very important to be successful in everyday living. The fourth key we will review is Brain Activity.

Tips for Brain Health

Socialize

- Keep in touch with friends and family
- Stay engaged or involved – volunteer in your community
- Know your neighbors
- Plug into the internet – use social media accounts to connect with friends and family

Mental Stimulation

- Games and puzzles – target areas of the brain linked to memory, concentration, language skills, visual-spatial abilities, logic, and organization
- Reading and writing – engages the hippocampus, which is responsible for memory
- Education and lifelong learning – enhances social activity, active citizenship, and personal development
- Hobbies – challenge the brain, especially ones that require hand-eye coordination and mental calculation, such as knitting, wood crafts, painting, sculpting, and playing an instrument
- Emotional/psychological/spiritual engagement – spiritual practices can involve prayer, yoga, walking, meditation, quiet contemplation, and other relaxation techniques that help you slow down and connect with the essence of who you are and what you value in life. Such practices can also help reduce stress, which has a negative impact on brain health.
- Exposure to new environments – challenge the brain to process new information.

Physical Activity

- Gets the heart pumping, which will send blood to the brain that is rich in oxygen and nutrients.
- Strive to walk 10,000 steps per day
- Be active for at least 30 minutes each day
- Play with children and grandchildren outside, take the stairs, ride a bike, go dancing, move around during television commercial breaks
- Strength train

Nutrition

- Seek foods high in antioxidants – fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts
- Power up with omega-3s – salmon, tuna, mackerel, trout, sardines, walnuts, pecans, almonds, leafy green vegetables, flax, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, and eggs
- Cut calories – choose your calories wisely

- Fight sodium and cholesterol – reduce eating meats and animal products that are high in fat, the amount of salt you put on your food, and limit processed foods

Catch your Zzzzzzs

Sleeping well is essential to good health and brain functioning.

For better sleep:

- Exercise, but not within a few hours of bedtime.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Set regular bedtime and waking hours.
- Get up and do something until you are tired and ready to sleep if you cannot fall asleep within the first 20 minutes of getting into bed.

Neurobics

Involves exercising parts of the brain that are not used on a regular basis. Challenging your physical and emotional senses enhances brain activity and health.

- Take a new driving or walking route to work.
- Brush your teeth, vacuum the house, or wash the dishes with the opposite hand.
- Take a shower with your eyes closed (be careful).
- Go to new places to experience new sights and smells.
- Find change in your wallet using your sense of touch rather than sight.

I want you to challenge your brain every day of the week!

For more information, contact the Wabaunsee County Extension Office at 785-765-3821 or email Bernadette Trieb, btrieb@ksu.edu.