

Sharpen up your brain for healthy ageing

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Want to keep your brain sharp as you age? There's more to it than just reading the encyclopaedia; many, and sometimes unexpected things help our brains function better.



OFF TO WORK WE GO

Keep working, psychologists say. The University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Research Institute says research shows the brains of modern 65 to 70 year olds, particularly physically active non-smokers, are in good shape compared with those of previous generations, many of whom retired much younger.

GET A MOVE ON

Regular aerobic exercise may be the most important ingredient for your brain's longterm health, say scientists. As well as your body, your brain gets steadily fitter too, as you exercise. Aim for at least 30 minutes' activity every second day.

HEALTHY BODY, HEALTHY MIND

Obesity, hypertension and Type 2 diabetes – all largely preventable – have been linked to an increased risk of cognitive decline and memory loss. Healthy choices like avoiding cigarettes and saturated fat lessens age-related damage to the brain, experts say.

SWEET DREAMS

When we don't sleep, proteins build up on synapses, possibly making it hard to think and learn new things. Poor sleep has been linked to cognitive decline in old age. If you're not sleeping well, take action.

TAKE A CHILL PILL

When we stress, harmful chemicals wash over brain areas involved in memory. Some scientists believe that living a balanced lifestyle and pursuing relaxing activities like yoga or pilates and socialising may delay memory impairment by reducing stress.

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Bilingualism may help delay the onset of dementia. A study of 44 elderly Spanish-English bilinguals found that those with a higher degree of bilingualism were more resistant to the onset of dementia and other symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. The higher the degree of bilingualism, the later the age of onset.