

## - Brain / Memory

# 5 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR BRAIN ACTIVE

From trying to remember things to playing a musical instrument to really taking in the moment, here are some handy pointers to help keep your brain stimulated, sharp and protected.

## 1. Test your memory

We've become so used to having information at our fingertips that few of us pause before looking something up. Flex your mental muscles by trying to remember. A recent study found that accessing facts from memory before Googling can enhance your learning and retention when you do look things up.

Psychotherapist Giorgio Aprile recommends making things you need to remember into songs. "It's easy to remember melodies, which is why we can sing tunes without looking at the lyrics," Giorgio says. Or create mind pictures. "Associating words or numbers with visuals will make it easier to recall them."

## 2. Break the habit

Too much time spent scrolling takes you away from more creative, constructive or fulfilling pursuits that have a positive impact on the brain. "Digital devices offer tempting distractions and this can prevent you from focusing on what you really want to do," says Dr Gilbert. Download the free app One Sec, which forces you to pause before opening distracting apps and websites.

## 3. Immerse yourself in nature

Tackling reduced attention isn't just about cutting screen time.



"That isn't enough, unless it's replaced by activities that increase attention span and reduce distraction," explains Dr Rosen. "One easy replacement is to experience nature, which is calming to an overactive brain." Pairing time outdoors with exercise can also help boost cognitive reserve – a 'store' of thinking abilities that may protect you against losses that can occur through ageing and disease.

## 4. Stimulate your mind

"Learning new skills that require activation and co-ordination of multiple sensory systems, such as dance, musical and visual arts, and many sports, are helpful in supporting cognitive reserve," says Dr Manwell. "Reading about, or listening to, new ideas helps build cognitive reserve, especially when doing so in social groups." Yes, your book club counts!

## 5. Look before you snap

Recording experiences can affect episodic memory (your recall of events and their context). "Paying attention to sensory stimuli, such as being more aware of what one is seeing, hearing and feeling in the moment, and reflecting on it after, helps encode and preserve that memory in more detail and for longer," says Dr Manwell. So, before you grab your camera, ground yourself in the moment and really engage your senses. **P**

