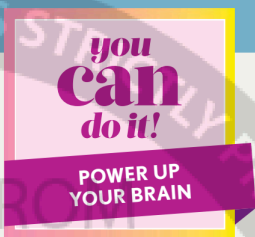


Good Health



6 WAYS TO GET EVEN SMARTER

Simple strategies to boost brainpower, eliminate memory blips and more

BY BRENDA KEARNS



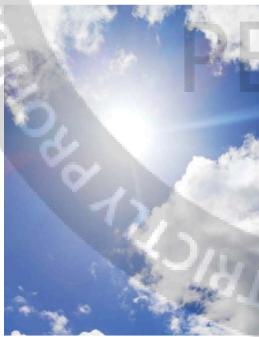
SHARPENS FOCUS

Seeing green

Spending time in nature can quickly perk up a sluggish brain. And you don't have to hike through forests to get the benefit. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee say simply relaxing near a houseplant can improve concentration in minutes. Turns out the sight of plants prompts the brain to release focus-sharpening beta waves and dials down the production of the delta waves that trigger grogginess.

SPEEDS THINKING**The scent of rose**

Breathing in rose oil heightens electrical activity in the brain, quickly restoring your ability to think on your feet and make smart decisions, experts say. More good news: A study conducted in Japan reveals that smelling rose oil throughout the day produces an even bigger mental boost since it speeds the growth of brain neurons that help you think clearly. To get the brain-boosting benefits, mix 6 drops of rose oil into 1 Tbs. of lotion and apply to your neck and shoulders twice daily.

**PREVENTS BRAIN SHRINKAGE****Midday sun**

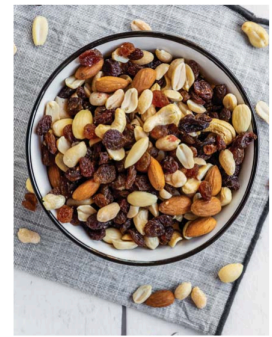
You don't need to take pricey supplements or overhaul your diet to keep your brain young and sharp: Soaking up a little sunshine mid-day (when spring's UV rays are at their peak) will do the trick! So say researchers in the journal *BMC Medicine*, who found that increasing sun exposure prevented brain shrinkage and protected against memory-robbing ills like dementia. The reason? Sun exposure increases your skin's production of vitamin D, a key brain-nourishing nutrient.

STOPS 'SENIOR MOMENTS'**A mini escape**

Great news if you love curling up in a quiet spot and getting lost in a book: Taiwan investigators have found that taking daily reading breaks halves your risk of forgetfulness and age-related memory loss, plus helps you stay clearheaded and sharp well into your 80s and beyond. The reason? Reading stimulates the release of BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), a powerful anti-aging compound in the brain.

**REVS RECALL****Moving to music**

If you keep forgetting where you left your keys, what you meant to add to the grocery list or why you just walked into the kitchen, spending a few minutes each day dancing to upbeat tunes could sharpen your recall in five days. Chinese scientists explain that moving to music stimulates the hippocampus, the brain region that helps you retain memories, thoughts and facts, then retrieve them at a moment's notice.

**MAXIMIZES MEMORY****A crunchy snack**

Nibbling on a handful of trail mix is a great way to tamp down between-meal hunger pangs. And enjoying this snack every day could halt (and even reverse) brain aging, giving you the razor-sharp memory of someone five years younger, report researchers in the journal *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*. Experts explain that plant compounds found in nuts and dried fruit keep the brain's memory center well-nourished and energized.