- Brain / Mind and body



Neuroscientist Andrew Scholey shares the five key ways to boost your brain health.

A *beautiful* MIND

Your brain is your most powerful asset, influencing everything from memory and focus to mood and energy. Just like the rest of your body, it thrives on the right nourishment, activity and rest. Here are five science-backed strategies to support brain function.

1 EAT THE RAINBOW

NUTRITION plays an important role in brain health. Foods that are part of the Mediterranean diet have been shown to protect the brain during ageing. This seems to be partly due to the brightly coloured foods in these types of diets. Such foods contain compounds called flavonoids believed to be responsible for the nutritional benefits of fruit and vegies, including improved brain health. Try for 20–30 different types of fruit and vegetables per week.

2 EXERCISE

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY is another powerful tool for brain health. Regular exercise increases levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which is like fertiliser for the brain, supporting growth and new connections between brain cells. Exercise reduces stress, anxiety and inflammation while improving sleep, mood and memory. Long term, it lowers the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Try to exercise regularly to the point you're a little out of breath for a total of at least 150 minutes per week (although even mild activity like walking and gardening has benefits).

3 CHALLENGE YOURSELF

LEARNING new skills boosts your brain health and mental function. Engaging in challenging activities helps strengthen the hippocampus, which is important for learning and memory. As well as getting a sense of accomplishment, skill acquisition promotes mental agility and reduces cognitive decline with age. In addition to long-term goals like learning to play an instrument or learning a new language, try daily challenges like crosswords and Sudoku.

4 GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

SLEEP is essential for brain health, boosting memory consolidation, learning and cognitive performance. Recent research indicates the brain's glymphatic system, which clears toxins and delivers nutrients, is most active during sleep. Adequate shut-eye also protects against cognitive decline and increases long-term mental resilience. Aim for seven to eight hours of quality snoozing.

5 DO NOTHING!

REST is vital for brain health, offering a chance to recharge, enhance creativity and improve focus. Rest activates the brain's default mode network – a kind of mental 'screensaver' that is associated with better brain health. People have different ways of resting, but activities such as reading, walking/running, being in nature, taking a bath/shower or simply daydreaming can have big benefits for your brain. P

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