

Brain Health 101

If you are like most people, your efforts to stay fit mean focusing on structures below your neck—your muscles and joints. Your brain, though, needs exercise too—and maybe even more than your muscles! When you think about it, it is hard accomplishing anything (working, playing, sleeping, learning, remembering ...) without a healthy brain, so taking care of your brain should be your number one priority.

Research in the area of brain health has exploded in the last few years and just as if you were training your body for a big race, there is a clear pathway that leads towards better brain health.

Here are my brain health tips that anyone can do, a sort of Brain Health 101:

- **Be Active:** If you don't have a regular exercise program, then start one. Any exercise will help improve blood flow to the brain and encourages the [growth of new brain cells](#). Regular exercise also reduces the risk of [heart disease and diabetes](#) (two big risk factors for poor brain health). Your exercise program doesn't have to be strenuous, even [walking can help](#).
- **Eat Well:** A low-fat, low-cholesterol diet full of fruits and vegetables, especially dark leafy greens is good for both your brain and your heart. A recent Harvard University study suggested that eating five daily servings of fruits and vegetables might [lower your stroke risk by as much as 30 percent](#).
- **Stay Healthy:** When you think about what is good for the brain, think about what is [good for your heart](#); the two are closely related. Diabetes also greatly [contributes to poor brain health](#). Do what you can to avoid these diseases by eating well, maintaining a healthy weight, and exercising regularly.
- **Keep Connected:** Social connections such as a group of close friends, church, club, or organization all appear to contribute to a [better outlook for your brain](#). Scientists are unsure the exact relationship, but it underscores how important people are for our continued health.
- **Brain Exercise:** The “use it or lose it” principle seems to work in our brains as well as for our muscles. Doing puzzles, taking on something challenging, anything to stimulate mental networks [can help the brain](#).
- **Stress Less:** Less stress is associated with better brain health and chronic stress has especially bad [effects on the brain](#). While stress is just a fact of modern life, there are many ways you can lessen the impact. Exercise is one of the best ways, along with meditation, yoga, prayer and contemplation.

Your brain needs your attention as much as the rest of your body. Take some time to have a fit brain.

Let us know what you are doing to keep your brain healthy.

Be well

Dr. Jamie