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Brain Health

As we age, our brains can change. We may have experienced misplacing our keys, forgetting why we went upstairs or needing help remembering what was on the grocery list.

There is normal ageing which we will each encounter, and there are more concerning issues such as Alzheimer's and dementia.

Cognition is similar to blood pressure in that it is affected by what we do in our day-to-day lives. If you want to control your blood pressure, you would include the following in your life:

- exercise
- sleep
- stress
- nutrition
- environment

These also support cognition. Let's take a look at each of these areas.

Exercise

Incorporating various exercise types into our routine such as cardio, resistance training, and stretching and then changing them up regularly so that our brain has to learn a new stand, a new way to balance, will support brain health. Consider adding coordination exercises to your routine, such as standing on one foot while rotating your arms in different directions. (Have fun!) When we increase our heart rate as with cardio, our brain and body enjoy that circulation of nutrients, oxygen and waste disposal.

I have a challenge for you: Track your exercise minutes for next week and strive for a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (2 hours and 30 minutes). If you are doing this, endeavour to increase it to 300 minutes weekly (5 hours a week).

Sleep

Think about the last time you didn't sleep well. How did you feel the next day? Did you experience brain fog, dizziness, forgetting words, and generally not up to snuff? For many, sleep is elusive. Rest is necessary so that the brain and body can repair themselves. While you are in dreamland, your brain is. Here are a few tips for improving your sleep.

- Drink water, non-caffeinated coffee or tea after 11:00 am
- Eliminate sugary drinks from your diet

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- Turn off all electronics one hour before bed. Read a book, meditate, or have a bath. In other words, relax. If you must be looking at your device or laptop, turn on dark mode to reduce the blue light.
- Lay face up on the floor with your hips against the wall and your legs up against the wall. Arms at a comfortable place. Stay there for 5 - 10 minutes to start. (Please be careful when you stand up - you may be a bit wonky).
- Once in bed, count backwards from 500 slowly.
- If you can't sleep, download a meditation app such as Headspace and listen to stories or sleep meditations. Headphones, such as sleep phones, are available, so you don't wake your partner.
- If you can't sleep, speak with your doctor, nutritionist, or naturopath for additional ideas.

Stress

Dreaded stress. Stress plays havoc with every system in our body.

Stress causes back pain which causes more stress.

Stress constricts our blood vessels.

Do I need to say more?

There are stressful times in our lives, such as family, work, and financial pressures. We can, however, change how to respond to stress. We can't completely rid our lives of stress, but we can change how we react to it.

Meditation, looking at what you can control, and keeping an updated to-do list are some ideas for managing stress. Equally important is having someone you can speak with, whether a trusted friend or a professional.

Nutrition

We can support our brain and, therefore, cognition by providing a balanced diet of vegetables, fruit, low-fat proteins, whole grains and healthy fats such as olive oil, avocado, or nuts. Eliminate or reduce processed foods, sugar and alcohol from your diet. Stay hydrated with water and herbal, non-caffeinated tea.

Environment

An environment that has both physical and cognitive demands can slow cognitive decline. An example is performing a bodyweight squat while catching a ball. If we combine exercise with cognitive demands, our brains must quickly integrate motor learning, control, decision making and planning.

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Summary

We are all going to age, and we will all encounter some form of cognitive decline. Creating a healthy environment for our brain to age may slow degeneration. Assessments to determine which brain functions would benefit from specific work to stimulate neuroplasticity are available from any Certified Brain Health Trainer. We can improve our memory, ability to dual-task, and plan. Just like training for the body, there is training for the brain.

Unfortunately, some of us will develop Alzheimer's or dementia. Although we can't stop this disease, we can help clients to enjoy life through similar exercises.

Take care of your brain! You get only one.

Disclaimer: This article is appropriate for individuals in the ordinary course of ageing, including dementia. This information is not suitable for people with brain injuries. Please see a concussion-educated provider if you seek information for recovery from a concussion.