

Six habits for good brain health

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Special to the Review

When you talk about “staying healthy” or “active aging,” you immediately think of your physical body and level of activity. What you probably forget about is your brain health. Just like a muscle in your body, your brain needs to get regular exercise in order to stay in good shape. You’ve heard it before – use it or lose it!

Aging doesn’t mean you have to fear losing your memory or feeling absent-minded as you get older. The things you do right now – and for years to come – will determine how healthy you stay both physically and mentally. So now is the time to start some great habits that will help to strengthen your brain and enjoy life for years to come.

So how do you keep your brain active? The following six lifelong habits can help to protect quite possibly the most valuable part of your body.

Regular Exercise

Physical activity not only strengthens your body, it builds up your brain, too. Exercise sends blood throughout your body delivering fresh oxygen to your brain.

Healthy Diet

The foods you eat are as important as the ones you don’t put on your plate. Some of the best foods for good, long-term brain function include avocados, blueberries, pomegranate juice, whole grains and wild salmon. Don’t forget to balance each meal with the right foods by using MyPlate (ChooseMyPlate.gov) as a guide.

Mental Stimulation

Your brain loves novelty. Do something that you haven’t done before, such as learn a new language or travel to somewhere exciting. Listen to new types of music, eat different kinds of foods. These activities strengthen recognition patterns that make your brain stronger and more engaged.

Quality Sleep

Just like a muscle, your brain needs to rest, too. Several hours of sound sleep will keep you alert and feeling mentally fresh throughout the day. Too little rest and you feel like you’re in a mental “fog.”

Stress Management

The hormones associated with stress put unneeded “wear and tear” on your entire body, so make sure to take time and relax. Learn yoga, check out books on

meditation from the library or just take a long, relaxing walk when you need it the most. Connect with the beauty of nature.

Active Social Life

Everything you love to do socially can strengthen your brain. Spend time with family and friends, attend public events, or join a club. Take a non-credit class in something you have always wanted to do, such as a dance class or a language course. All of these interactions are forms of mental exercise.

Commit these six habits to memory to make the most of your mental health. Take time to stimulate your senses and try new activities. You'll find renewed strength, and your body and mind will love you for it.

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