

8 Strategies to Keep Your Mind Sharp

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There's a lot you can do to keep your mind sharp or even enhance it. There are a variety of ways to exercise your brain, from learning something new, to exercise, to quitting unsupportive habits.

Your brain eventually ages just like any other part of your body, but there is much you can do to slow, or even reverse, the aging process. It's never too soon or too late to work on keeping your mind sharp.

Try these suggestions:

- 1. Learn a foreign language.** Learning a new language is challenging! Between learning new vocabulary and grammar rules, you'll give your brain a full workout. You'll even become a better listener. Pick a language that interests you. Hopefully, it will be one that you find useful, too.
- 2. Meditate.** Meditation is all about focus. With age, it can be more challenging to concentrate. **Daily meditation feels good, helps you to relax, and gives your brain a workout.** Develop a daily meditation practice and notice all the benefits you gain.
- 3. Exercise your brain and body.** There are many ways to exercise your brain. Listen to classical music, take a math class, do a crossword puzzle, read a challenging book, make a list of random words and try to remember it. Play bridge or poker.
 - Exercising your body can help your brain, too. Avoid exercising to exhaustion, but exercise enough to give your heart and lungs a workout too. Find an activity you love to do. See your doctor if you have any concerns or questions.

4. **Avoid smoking and excessive drinking.** Some studies show that a drink a day is healthy. That's one drink. There are no studies that support smoking as a health booster. One of the ways to keep your mind sharp is to stop doing the things that damage it.
5. **Learn something new. Learning creates actual structural changes in your brain.** Take a class at your local community college. Teach yourself sign language or how to play the piano. There must be something that you'd like to know more about. Now is the time to indulge yourself a little.
6. **Get enough rest. Less than seven hours of sleep has been shown to impair cognitive function on multiple levels.** Decision-making and memory are just two examples. Get enough sleep and your brain will function at a higher level. Start tonight.
7. **Do things in a new way.** Take a few everyday tasks and try doing them in a new way. For example:
 - Eat with your opposite hand.
 - Get dressed with your eyes closed or with only one hand.
 - Wear your watch upside down.
 - What ideas can you come up with?
8. **Turn the volume on your TV down a notch.** Set the volume to a comfortable level and then turn it down one click. See if you can follow what's being said. When that becomes easy, turn it down another notch. Repeat. These steps help your brain's ability to process auditory information.

The best time to work on maintaining your brain health was 20 years ago; the second best time is today.

Get started immediately and challenge your brain in new ways.

Part of the reason we lose mental sharpness is routine. Middle-aged and older adults do the same things each day and rarely do or learn anything new. **Dare to be different.** Stretch your brain and reap the rewards.