

Ten Tips for a Healthy Brain

Every day we make choices that can build a solid foundation for future health and safety... or not! Lifestyle choices can add or subtract years to a life. The following are 10 tips for a healthy brain.



Tip 1: Take Personal Responsibility For Your Health

Learn to recognize and control your personal health and safety risks. Work closely together with your physician and other related health care workers to choose the best actions you can take to promote your health and safety. To identify personal health and safety risk factors, check out the [SAFESM](#)!

Tip 2: Pay Attention to What and How Much You Eat!

Take a look at the USDA's food pyramid. Eat well balanced meals. Do not overeat. Don't go to bed "stuffed." Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.

- *For more info check out our [January 2005 newsletter](#)*
- *Read the [USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005](#).*
- *The USDA's ["My Pyramid"](#)*

Tip 3: Get Plenty of Restful Sleep

Why? Sleep is essential for survival. Really good sleep is essential for safety and health. Without restful sleep, the ability to learn, focus, remember, pay attention or respond quickly declines. A lack of sleep causes mood changes and mental confusion. Studies also indicate there is an increase in faulty decision making and risk taking! More accidents occur when sleepy! For brain and body health, get plenty of restful sleep.

For more information, check out

- [SAFE Aging's April 2006 newsletter](#)
- [Sleeping Tips](#)
- <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/sleepandaging/toc.html>

Tip 4: Breathe

It seems so simple, but breathing is vital for brain health. Every so often in the day, take a deep, long enjoyable breath and slowly let it out. This increases oxygen through the blood stream and creates a whole bevy of wonderful physical and mental benefits.

For more information about breathing, refer to [SAFE Aging's Sept. 2005 newsletter](#)

For a little energy boost and a way to reduce stress, try some *deep* breathing.

Position: Get comfortable: Standing is better, but sitting is OK.

Precaution: Do not do quickly. Fast breathing could cause hyperventilation.

Purpose: Stress reduction, relaxation

Instruction:

1. Take a very SLOW, but deep breath.
2. Completely fill your lungs with this breath.
3. Hold it for a second or two.
4. Then slowly release this air.
5. Repeat this 3 or 4 times, or whenever you feel stress getting the better of you.

Tip 5: Get Fit! Be Fit! Stay Fit!

Regular physical activity is good a thing! Even modest amounts like walking three times a week for only 15 minutes each time can cut the risk of dementia while improving overall health. It makes sense. Exercise increases breathing. Breathing improves circulation, and blood circulation contributes to healthy bones, muscles, joints and mental fitness. It works the heart and the lungs and reduces cardiovascular risks such as stroke (aka "brain attack") and heart attacks.

More scientific studies are in progress to determine the "type, frequency, intensity, or duration of physical activity that is most beneficial in preventing cognitive deterioration."

For more information about exercising refer to

- [SAFE Aging's January, 2005 newsletter](#)
- [Exercise Programs](#)
- <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/exercise/toc.html>

Tip 6: Fill Your Day with Laughter

Why? There are many reasons why laughter should become a vital part of your day. Smiling will make you feel better. In fact, laughter is infectious. It makes everybody feel good. Here are some reasons to use laughter as a stress release:

- Laughter stimulates the immune system
- Laughter changes your focus
- Laughter improves concentration
- Fosters healing
- Improves breathing
- Improves circulation
- Unleashes natural pain killers
- *For more info, refer to [SAFE Aging's Sept. 2005 newsletter](#)*

Tip 7: Manage Your Stress

WHY? Stress sets off a warning sign in the brain, which responds by preparing the body for defensive action. The nervous system is aroused and hormones are released to sharpen the senses, quicken the pulse, deepen respiration, and tense the muscles.

Short lived or occasional episodes of manageable stress poses little risk, but long term stress, keeping the body in a constant state of readiness to respond, will increase the wear and tear to all biological systems in the body. It is when the body has been exposed to continual, unrelenting stress that physical and emotional damage can occur. Too much stress over a long period of time can literally be sickening. Manage your stress; it is good for overall health.

For more information

- [SAFE Aging's Nov. 2005 newsletter](#)
- [SAFE Aging's Aug. 2005 newsletter](#)

Tip 8: Drink Plenty of Water

Why? A mere 2% drop in body water can trigger short term memory loss, cause trouble with basic math calculation and difficulty focusing or paying attention. Drinking 8-10 glasses of water a day can ease back pain and joint pain, and eliminate problems with constipation. Lack of water is also the biggest trigger for daytime fatigue. Drinking water is vital for body and brain health. Have a glass right now!

Tip 9: Limit Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol affects the brain. With just a drink or two, difficulty walking, blurred vision, slurred speech, slowed reaction times, impaired memory can happen. Long term use causes significant brain impairment. Limit alcohol consumption.

- *For more information, refer to* <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/aa63/aa63.htm>

Tip 10: Give Up Smoking!

WHY? Smoking a cigarette sends chemicals to the brain, changing its chemistry, and affecting a smoker in many ways. Nicotine reaches the brain ten seconds after smoke is inhaled. Because the brain is the body's center for mood and conscious thought, nicotine has an effect on both. Smoking causes strokes, along with many other serious medical conditions.

Recent research indicates years of tobacco use may dim the speed and accuracy of a person's thinking ability and reduce IQ. The effect on memory, problem-solving and IQ was most pronounced among those who had smoked for years. It is never too late to stop. Give up smoking today.

- http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2005-10/uomh-dsc101005.php
- <http://www.smokefree.gov/pubs/FFree8.pdf>