Tips for Integrated Brain Fitness

Brain training is the cornerstone of brain fitness, however, there’s more you can do. Inside, find suggestions for brain-healthy nutrition, physical activity, social activity and more.

Challenge  Nourish  Energize  Recharge

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Learn to juggle — or if you already know how, work to improve your skills!

Juggling is a great hand-mind-eye coordination activity that studies have shown can actually increase gray matter in your brain. Even just 7 days of juggling training showed a difference.

Here’s a step-by-step guide:

Step 1: Find three balls (or beanbags, or oranges, or whatever). Start with one ball and practice until you can throw it perfectly every time.

Step 2: Add a second ball, then a third.

Step 3-4: Practice, practice, practice until you can juggle three balls for longer and longer times.

Want some help?
Search out a how-to juggle video.

If you already know how to juggle, step it up a notch. Here are some ideas:

- Teach yourself how to joggle — juggle and jog at the same time.
- Add a fourth or fifth ball to your juggling.
- Find a juggling friend and practice two-person juggling.
- Use flames or knives instead of balls. (Just kidding. Don’t do that.)
Some people think that doodling when you’re listening means you’re not paying attention. Research has shown that doodling can actually improve attention and memory.

Here are some ways to learn more about doodling and make the most of your doodling:

- Whether you’re already a doodler or not, try doodling whatever you want while listening to new information. That might be in a class, taking details from a phone call, at a work meeting, or in any other situation where you want to remember what you hear.

- Learn how to step up your doodling, turning it into “visual note-taking,” also called “sketchnoting.” Check out an expert like Sunni Brown, author of *The Doodle Revolution*.

- Are you more likely to take notes on a tablet or another device? If so, check out some of the available apps that help with visual note-taking, such as Flipink and Inkflow Visual Notebook.

- Put what you’ve learned to use! Try incorporating meaningful doodles into your note-taking and decide whether it is a useful tool for your memory and attention.

How Could Doodling Improve Memory?

One thought is that doodling helps you connect visual cues with verbal information, giving your brain more avenues to retrieve the information.

Another possibility is that doodling occupies your brain just enough to keep you on task. It prevents you from daydreaming, which is to say it keeps you from becoming totally distracted from the matter at hand. In one study, people who doodled while listening to a boring telephone message remembered 29% more than people who just listened without doodling.
Nourish Your Brain
Just Go

NUTS

Appease your appetite for almonds, please your palate with pistachios, and work some wholesome walnuts into your diet. Nuts are one of the 10 identified brain-healthy foods in the MIND diet, which one large-scale study suggested could slow cognitive decline by 7.5 years.

Why nuts — and which nuts?

- **Walnuts** (especially the English and Persian varieties) are probably the best overall. As with other nuts, they are great sources of antioxidants and vitamin E — but they are also the nut highest in Omega-3 fatty acids. As one study showed, higher walnut consumption (an average of about 10 grams per day, a small handful at most) improved cognitive performance on a battery of tests.

- **Almonds and hazelnuts** are two fantastic sources of vitamin E, and vitamin E intake has been associated with less age-related cognitive decline. In one study, people who received vitamin E improved statistically and clinically in memory and verbal measures, while participants who received a placebo did not. About a third of Americans do not get enough vitamin E.

- **Pistachios** are also a great choice, as recent research has shown they contain several types of antioxidant compounds that can be beneficial to the brain and body. Interestingly, from a nutritional perspective, pistachios have more in common with fruits and vegetables than with other types of nuts.

  You may have noticed that pistachios are more colorful than other nuts. Their green, yellow and purple shading correlate with their beneficial antioxidants. The purple color comes from anthocyanins, which are the powerful brain-boosting nutrients found in blueberries. The yellow color can be attributed to beta carotene, lutein and polyphenols, which are found in olive oil, grapes, and other healthy fruits and seeds.

Five servings of nuts a week is recommended.
Amy’s Cinnamon Almonds
Amy Roskelley
blog, superhealthykids.com

Ingredients
1 lb almonds
1 egg white
1 tsp vanilla
¾ cup brown sugar
¼ cup white sugar
½ tsp salt
2 tsps cinnamon

Preparation
1. Preheat oven to 225°F.
2. Whisk the egg white and the vanilla until fluffy.
3. Stir almonds into the egg white mixture.
4. In separate bowl, combine the sugars, salt, and cinnamon.
5. Pour the almonds into the sugar mixture and mix to coat the almonds with the sugar.
6. Pour almonds onto a cookie sheet and spread into a thin layer. Bake for 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes.
7. Let cool and eat.
Serves 16

Almonds are high in vitamin E, which may stave off Alzheimer’s and dementia. Just a half cup of almonds provides nearly 100% of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin E.

Find these and more delicious brain healthy recipes at brainhq.com, Search: recipes

Pecan-crusted Chicken
Spicy Almond Soba Noodles
Studies show that dancing reduces stress and improves mood — but also that it can improve cognitive function and reduce risk of dementia.

How to get started with dancing:

• **Sign up for a dance class**, ideally one that's partner-based. It can be a more advanced class for a type of dancing you already know or a beginner's class of a dance that's new to you. Go to class and try your hardest while you're there to learn the moves and respond to your partner's moves.

• **Dance at home!** Get on YouTube or another video website and follow along with dancing tutorials — keep practicing, and soon you'll be doing the tango, waltz or even moonwalking.

**Why is dancing good for the brain?**
Here's a brief description on why dancing is especially good for the brain from Dr. Michael Merzenich: "Complex dances require you use multiple senses at the same time — sight, sound and motion — coordinating your movements in time with the music and your partner's steps, all while remembering a routine. That kind of multimodal activity gives your brain a great workout, in addition to the aerobic benefits of exercise."
Energize Your Brain
Bike Your Way to a Better Brain

Recent studies have found that biking can build the brain's white matter, among other things.

Pick a month and incorporate biking into your life:

**Week 1:** Figure out how to access a bike you can use this month. If you already have a bike — and the weather is okay for biking and your bike is in good shape — you're set! If you don't have a bike, find out how to borrow, rent or buy one. And if the weather isn't cooperative for biking, see if there's a way you can use a stationary bike.

**Week 2:** Take a ride! Whether it's a just one block or 50 miles, getting on the bike is a great idea for your body and your brain.

**Week 3:** Make a day of a bike ride. Take a friend or two and pack a picnic lunch — or plan to stop at a restaurant for lunch. If you're using a stationary bike, reward a good workout session with lunch with a friend.

**Week 4:** Try riding your bike somewhere you would normally drive — to the bank, work, or a friend's home. If you're using a stationary bike, try upping your mileage.
Certain activities can better prepare your mind and body for sleeping, leading to more restful nights and more energized days.

A lot of us like to be active right up until the time we get into bed. But for the best sleep, there are some activities we should probably cut out in the hour or two before hitting the hay.

If you’d like to sleep better, here are 4 ideas to try:

1. **Turn down the light:** Exposure to light makes it harder for your body to secrete melatonin, a hormone that helps you sleep. “Blue light” is especially bad. Your phone, tablet, other electronics, and energy-efficient lightbulbs (fluorescent and LED) are all sources of blue light. So if you want to fall asleep, try turning down the lights and turning off the screens a couple of hours before bed to let your melatonin kick in.¹

2. **Don’t drink alcohol before bed:** Alcohol can help you fall asleep, but drinking too much of it tends to disrupt the second half of your night. Studies show it reduces rapid eye movement (REM) sleep,² which can have a negative effect on memory and concentration. And while alcohol consumption increases the restorative delta waves of “deep sleep,” it does so in a way that actually disrupts that sleep, which can lead to drowsiness, irritability and headaches. For a better night’s sleep, cut out the nightcap!³

   **Tip:** Replace a late-night alcoholic drink with a glass of cherry juice. One study showed that drinking tart cherry juice increased melatonin and improved sleep time and efficiency.⁴

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¹Blue light has a dark side. Harvard Health Publications. 2015 Sep 2. Online publication.
3. **Tone down the food:** Large meals 3–4 hours before bed can cause acid reflux, which can disrupt sleep. At least one study suggested that spicy food may be a culprit in sleep loss too. Another suggested that eating meals low in fiber and high in saturated fat worsens sleep quality. As a test, try not to eat much after about 8 p.m., and see how your sleep is!

4. **Stop stressing:** If you’re one of the 43% of adults who report that stress sometimes leads to a loss of sleep, try embracing a “winding down” period for a couple of hours before bed — no work, socializing, or anything else that heightens stress. It might also help to practice calming activities, like smelling lavender, meditating or taking a hot bath.

The stress-sleep cycle is vicious. People who stress more sleep less, and people who sleep less stress more, so it’s important to get bedtime stress under control!

Learn more about sleep's relationship to memory, look up this TED Talk.
**Brain Health Matters**

9 in 10 people say brain health is important, but few know how to maintain or improve it.

Source: AARP Brain Health Research Study, September 2014

**Give Adults the Edge on Brain Health**

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- Record What You See & Hear
- Fine Tune Your Ability to Find Your Way
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