

# EXERCISE YOUR BRAIN



As we grow older, we tend to grow wiser with each year. While our knowledge can continue to increase, our ability to make connections and process information can slow with age. The good news: Our daily food and fitness habits can make a difference in the aging process.

**“We can reduce the effects of aging on the brain with a sustained active and challenging life, even if this stimulation is only begun in middle age.”**

– Gerd Kempermann, M.D.  
(lead author of an aging study)

Try these activities to help keep your brain healthy and sharp.

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## Stay Physically Active

Physical activity helps maintain good blood flow to the brain. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that most adults get 30 minutes of moderate activity most days, preferably every day. Short segments of physical activity (such as three 10-minute walks) count toward the goal.

Stimulate your brain by adding variety to your activities. Try a new activity, alternate activities throughout the week or take a new route when you walk or jog. Routine activities don't challenge your brain, so mix it up a little.

### Tips to Increase Physical Activity:

- Walk, jog, swim or do yoga
- Join an exercise program at a local gym or use a DVD or online video
- Dance, golf or canoe
- Clean the house
- Mow the lawn
- Walk the dog
- Plant and care for a vegetable or flower garden

**Dancing was found to be the No. 1 physical activity to decrease the onset of dementia.**

## Try Some Brain Exercises

Your brain can be exercised just like the rest of your body. Activities such as brain teasers challenge your brain to think in new ways and form new connections. Results of the 2006 ACTIVE (Advanced Cognitive Training for Independent and Vital Elderly) study found that cognitive training resulted in improved cognitive abilities that continued up to five years. Participants were trained for memory, reasoning and speed of processing.

**“Mental exercise ... it has to be consistent, and it has to be challenging. Just like you have to keep increasing the weights at the gym to make it challenging, you have to do the same with mental activity.”**

– Sherry L. Willis, Ph.D.,  
lead author of the 2006 ACTIVE study

### Tips to help your memory:

- Learn a new skill
- Volunteer in your community, school or place of worship
- Spend time with family and friends
- Use memory tools (to-do lists, calendars, notes to yourself)
- Put your wallet, keys, purse in the same place each day
- Get plenty of rest

### Activities to keep your brain sharp:

- Do crossword and jigsaw puzzles, word finds or Sudoku puzzles
- Play card games, board games and bingo
- Read the newspaper, books or magazines
- Knit, paint, draw or do other crafts
- Play a musical instrument or learn a foreign language
- Stay up to date on technology but don't mindlessly scroll through your phone

## Brain Teasers

**Give your brain a workout and try to solve these brain teasers.** (answers below)

1. RUE
2. C O F F E E
3. IS IS IS IS IS IS IS IS IS IS
4. Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins  
Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins  
Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins  
Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins Vitamins
5. **Quick!** Say out loud what color you see in every word, NOT the word you read. This test measures mental vitality and flexibility.

red white green brown  
green red brown white  
white brown green red  
red white green brown  
brown green white red  
white brown red green  
green white brown red  
red brown green white

**Brain Teaser Answers:**  
1. Are You Ready? (R+U+red E); 2. Coffee Break;  
3. Tennis (Ten Is); 4. Multivitamins

See NDSU publication [FN1414](#), “Nourish Your Brain With a Healthful Diet,” for more about brain health.

**For more information on this and other topics, see [www.ag.ndsu.edu/food](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/food)**

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