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Sharpen-Your-Mind Games Women'sHealth

A mental fitness plan to boost memory, amp creativity, and fine-tune focus

By the Editors of Women's Health

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Exercise Your Intelligence

It's a win-win! These activities aren't just fun, they're also some of the best ways to grow gray matter, according to top brain doctors. (For example, dancing uses a bunch of brain systems, including planning, coordination, and judgment, while meditation has been shown to affect parts of the brain associated with learning and memory.)

- Learn a musical instrument
- Study a foreign language
- Meditate or do yoga
- Play chess (or another challenging board game)
- Take a dance class
- Learn a complex skill, such as painting
- Take college-level or advanced courses
- Learn to juggle

Strength Train Your Brain

Working out enhances production of the proteins that stimulate brain-cell growth and can help your neurons work optimally, says John J. Ratey, M.D., author of *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. Try these:

- Strength train for an hour three times a week. Keep at it, and it can help improve memory performance as you age, says a study published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*.
- Do high-intensity intervals or resistance training, which can spike levels of brain-healthy hormones, says Ratey. Do two 30-minute sessions a week.

How Cardio Workouts Make You Smarter

Fuel Your Mental Muscle

- **Eggs** contain choline, an essential nutrient that helps brain function.
- **Blueberries** are high in epicatechin, which can help hone your focus.
- **Salmon** has omega-3 fatty acids, which are thought to promote brain health.

Mess with Your Head

Bulk up brainpower with neurobics, a system of mental drills that forces you to use your senses and stimulate your mind in unexpected ways. Some easy ones to try:

- Use your nondominant hand to brush your teeth or write.
- Wear earplugs while doing different tasks.
- Turn photos on your desk upside down for an hour.
- Try navigating around your home with your eyes closed.

7 More Easy Ways to Boost Your Brainpower

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Genius Ways to Get Smarter

Robert Bjork, Ph.D., is an associate professor of psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles and an expert on learning and memory. In the soon-to-be-released book *Brain Trust*, by Garth Sundem, he shares his best brain-sharpening tricks.

Overwhelm yourself. "People tend to learn in blocks, mastering one thing before moving on to the next," says Bjork. A more effective way: a strategy known as interweaving. Say you want to improve your tennis game. Instead of spending an hour on your serve, mix in a range of drills, like backhands and footwork.

Change the scenery. Studying in different environments helps your ability to recall the information later. Don't review your notes only in your office, for example: Read them on your couch, in bed, at a coffee shop, and so on. Or if you always study in the evening, try reviewing your notes first thing in the morning.

Quit cramming. Whether you're mastering a new computer program or learning a foreign language, space your study sessions far enough apart so you can barely remember the info from the first session. "The more you have to work to pull it from the soup of your mind, the more your next study session will reinforce learning," says Bjork.

Provided by Women's Health

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