



## A New Era for Getting Fit: Exercise for your Brain

Typically when we think of exercise, we think of working the muscles of the body from the neck down. But what we tend to neglect is exercise for the brain; a hugely important muscle that requires most of the oxygen our bodies circulate. Keeping the brain healthy is so incredibly important in almost everything we do: thinking, feeling, memory, working, playing and even sleeping! That is why it is important to recognize the need to keep your brain healthy as you age. Here are a few key steps that can help to keep your brain strong, sharp and even reduce risks of disease.

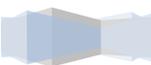
**1. Get/Stay Physically Active:** So much goes on in the brain, as discussed earlier. Therefore, adequate blood flow to the brain is essential for all of these roles the brain plays a part in! And to get good blood flow to the brain, exercise is the key. When you exercise, your blood vessels dilate which decreases blood pressure and allows for better circulation. Exercise also increases new brain cell growth, and the great news is that the exercise you do does not have to be strenuous. It just needs to be regularly consistent to reap the benefits. Also, the type of exercise that is best for the brain is aerobic because it improves your oxygen consumption. And what most people don't realize is that physical activity involves mental activity as well. Planning routes, making choices and being aware of your surroundings during exercise all contribute to a healthy brain.

**2. Adopt a Brain-Healthy Diet:** The brain needs nutrients to function. One of the best things you can do to have a brain healthy diet is reduce your intake of foods high in saturated fats. Saturated fats can clog arteries and reduce blood flow to the brain. Stick to mono and polyunsaturated fats (olive oil, avocado). Fruits and vegetables are full of antioxidants, which help prevent memory loss and keep the brain sharp. Nuts also are a great source of antioxidants and vitamin E, which protects our brain from destructive free radicals. Cold-water fish are a great option for brain health because of the omega-3 fatty acids that aid in the transmission of brain signals allowing communication in the brain to be more efficient.

**3. Stay Mentally Active:** It is especially important as you age to keep the brain active. Doing so can help increase brain vitality and reserve brain connections. A mentally active brain is also protective against Alzheimer's disease by keeping your memory strong and active. The addition of small exercises for your brain in your day can add up to big benefits later on.

Some ways to add mental stimulation into your day are:

- Stay curious and involved – commit to lifelong learning
- Read, write, paint or do puzzles (Sudoku, crosswords)
- Attend plays and go to museums



- Play games (chess, scrabble, checkers, solitaire)
- Garden
- Memory exercises
- Make crafts

**For more tips on exercising your brain, contact Sharon Rateike, corporate wellness program coordinator at (920) 568-5475 or [Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com](mailto:Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com).**

