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Brain training

"Memory, like muscular strength, requires you to 'use it or lose it'", explains Terence Watts, a psychotherapist and creator of BrainWorking Recursive Therapy or BWRT (bwrt-worldwide.com). "The more you work out your brain, the better you will be at processing information and keeping your brain healthy in order to reduce your risk of dementia. Good brain workouts have these three elements: they teach you something new, they're challenging and they're rewarding. There is no single 'magic wand' technique to brain health. It's a culmination of constantly trying and learning new things to keep those brain cells fired up."

Terence recommends introducing new activities into your daily or weekly routine to create new neural pathways which will increase cognitive ability and improve your memory. Here are a few things to try:

- Handwrite a letter and send to friends or family. Handwriting fires up a different part of your brain than typing on the computer or texting on your phone – challenging your brain to think differently.
- Try something new that you've always wanted to learn like salsa dancing, learning French or playing tennis. Learning something new will improve your brain function and memory. If the activity includes hand-eye coordination, even better as that's a great way to stimulate brain function!

Terence adds: "Remember that exercise plays an important role in neuroplasticity – the brain's ability to modify, change, and adapt – by boosting growth factors and stimulating new neuronal connections. It increases oxygen to your brain and reduces the risk for disorders that lead to memory loss."



HOW FOOD AFFECTS THE BRAIN

"Diet has a direct impact on brain health and the food you eat can significantly affect memory, learning, behaviour and mood," explains Michelle Sanchez, a Naturopath, Nutritionist and Medical Herbalist from the College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM). "Foods that are high in sugar, unhealthy fats and artificial ingredients cause inflammation in the brain which can increase your risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Sugar-laden, highly processed diets have also been linked to disruptions in the blood-brain barrier; this is a protective membrane between the brain and body's blood supply to prevent harmful substances from entering the brain. The worst foods and drinks for brain health are refined carbohydrates (pasta, bread, pastries), snack foods, artificial sweeteners, sugary drinks, hydrogenated oils (refined vegetable oils, margarine, baked products), ready meals, packaged / processed foods, certain types of fish including tuna and swordfish (as they contain high levels of mercury), alcohol and coffee. Adopting an organic, whole food diet that is rich in nutrients and antioxidants is key for brain health. Brain-boosting foods include blueberries, broccoli, leafy greens (kale, spinach, rocket), pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, Brazil nuts, chia seeds, flaxseeds, walnuts, small oily fish like sardines or mackerel, turmeric, whole grains (oats, quinoa, buckwheat), beans and pulses."



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