



## 10 exercises for your brain

The kinds of skills that tend to weaken with age are ones that, at any age, must be used to maintain them. Your brain adds physical capacity, just as your other physical systems do. You can get your brain back "in shape," but it won't stay there without your regular effort. These simple exercises, based in science, can help you keep all the tools in your mental toolbox sharp!

### Exercise #1:

#### Recall what you just forgot

Everybody forgets what they went into the next room to get. It isn't a problem with memory. Usually it's a matter of something psychologists call interference or divided attention. Trace your movements back in your mind. Picture what you were just doing and where you were. Pop! You will remember why you are standing in front of a desk with your pen in your hand.

### Exercise #2:

#### Remember new words

Any new vocabulary word can be remembered more easily if you take the time to look up its historical source (also known as its etymology). For example, the useful word "captious" will be hard to remember. It means "fault-finding," "quibbling" or "critical." Until you see it contains the same root as the word "capture." In other words, captious means "trying to catch someone in an error."

### Exercise #3:

#### Tune in to something new

Tune in to a radio station you never listen to — one of the ones you usually pass over quickly. Don't be quick to

reject or judge what you hear, whether it's a music station, a very local public broadcasting station, or a talk station with a bombastic and self-righteous host. Listening to someone you disagree with will give you the opportunity to formulate counter-arguments in your mind.

### Exercise #4:

#### Play the devil's advocate

(But Only Among Friends, at First) Set minds do not improve with age. Next time a topic comes up that you have always known about (it could be defense spending, the death penalty, etc.), try making a good argument for the opposite point of view. You may end up feeling more sure of your original opinion, or less sure of it. Either way, it's a good exercise in logical thinking, and it's fun!

### Exercise #5:

#### Find a tennis ball

Got a tennis ball handy? Pick a numbers task like balancing a checkbook. Start checking the numbers while you squeeze the tennis ball rapidly in your RIGHT hand. That will also help you get started solving a crossword puzzle more quickly. Why? Your brains circuits go to sleep when you don't use them so you need to wake them up. The left side of your brain handles simple math tasks. When it picks up activity on the opposite side of your body, it wakes up to monitor it.

### Exercise #6:

#### Play charades

Most people are more concerned about their memory than about their prowess in games like charades. In fact, inability

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to play pantomime games is one symptom of dementia. In addition to the workout that games of charades can give to cognitive skills, they also serve as an excuse for social interaction, and can even provide a little physical exercise. All those factors — mental, social, and physical stimulation — help the brain stay fit and healthy.

#### **Exercise #7:**

##### **Punctuate creatively**

Exercise your skills by punctuating the following two statements in various ways. One makes the woman seem subservient; another makes her seem essential.

"A woman without her man is nothing."

How could you arrange punctuation to mean that the condemned gunslinger was firing before, or after, his hanging?

"Billy the Kid shot the sheriff half an hour after he was hung."

#### **Exercise #8:**

##### **Work your way to math smarts**

One easy way to be the person who can come up with the math answer fast is to practice with everyday figuring. For example, figure out in your head: How much to leave for a tip; how much change the clerk should hand back after you pay for your newspaper; how much more quickly you'd reach your destination if you drove 5 mph faster.

#### **Exercise #9:**

##### **Stir up your brain cells**

Use everyday down-times to stir up your brain cells. For example, while waiting in line at the checkout try to estimate the total grocery bill in your head. Estimate crowd sizes or pairs of

shoes on your train. Visualize each of the tasks you plan to complete that day and mentally walk through the steps to accomplish each one (do that the night before and your brain will start solving problems while you sleep).

#### **Exercise #10:**

##### **The single best 20-minute brain-maintenance exercise**

If you do nothing else to help your brain help you, walk briskly for 20 minutes at least every other day. A fit body pumps more blood to energize brain cells. For example, walk to pick up the morning paper instead of having it delivered. Trot along with the dog (to benefit you both in different ways). Walk to the next-to-closest bus stop, or, in the morning pack your dress shoes in your briefcase, wear walking shoes and walk from the train station.

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