Healthy Aging: Six Ways to Improve Brain Health

If you’ve been working crossword puzzles to exercise your brain, TriHealth Seniority Coordinator Pam Baird says that, while they can be fun and challenging, you might want to try some other things to work out your brain.

“Crossword puzzles really are not a brain exercise because you already know the words,” she laughs. “You’re not learning anything and you’re not making yourself work harder.” Fortunately, there are plenty of habits you can start now to help stave off forgetfulness later:

#1: Paint, Draw, or Solve Jigsaw Puzzles
Activities like painting and working jigsaw puzzles with more than 500 pieces stimulate the right side of your brain, requiring you to practice both visualization and thought.

#2: Exercise
“If you’re active four times a week, for 12 weeks in a row, you’ll have twice the blood flow to your hippocampus, where those neurons are created,” Pam explains. The hippocampus is a region of the brain associated with memories, learning and emotions, and continues to create new cells as we age.

#3: Eat Foods Your Brain Needs
Our brain needs fats, particularly, the “good” kinds – including omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids – to operate. However, Pam says she tends to stress the importance of eating omega-3s because it’s easier to get these nutrients through your diet, instead of supplements. Foods high in omega-3 include:

- Fish, including tuna, salmon, and cod
- Cauliflower
- Cabbage
- Kale
- Edamame
- Walnuts
- Flaxseed
- Tofu

#4: Participate in Debates
When you debate, you’re thinking fast. Debates force your brain to listen to the individual you’re debating with and think – quickly – to articulate your response.

#5: Laugh Often
Cortisol, the stress hormone, kills brain cells. When you laugh and release endorphins, you’re feeding the brain, so stress-relief activities, like laughter, are important for improving your brain health.

#6: Exercise Your Peripheral Vision
Acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter, is a chemical messenger that’s critical for memory, mental alertness, concentration, and other cognitive functions. Through exercising your peripheral vision, you stimulate your hippocampus and, in turn when you go to sleep, your body gets a new release of neurons and brain cells. To exercise peripheral vision, first sit in place outside your house (on a bench or in a café) and stare straight ahead. Concentrate on everything you see both straight ahead and peripherally and then write it down.
Healthy Aging: Maintaining Physical Fitness & Flexibility

Exercise is a key piece of overall physical and mental wellbeing, no matter our age. As we get older, however, it becomes increasingly important to maintain muscle mass and bone density, as well as functional ability. Sarcopenia, or muscle loss, can begin as early as age 30—physically inactive people can experience 3-5% of muscle loss each decade after 30. Osteopenia, or bone density loss, is most common after age 50. Inactivity, especially lack of strength training, can increase a person’s risk.

Low-impact exercise is a great way to maintain physical fitness without putting too much strain on joints. It typically is defined as any activity where one foot is on the ground at all times. Remember: low-impact does not have to mean low intensity!

Consider these options:

- **Swimming or water aerobics.** Working out in the water is a great way to get a full body workout without straining your joints.
- **Cycling.** It’s family-friendly exercise that’s also kind to your body!
- **Elliptical machine.** The elliptical is a great substitute for the treadmill.
- **Rowing machine.** Often an under-utilized machine, rowing is a great cardiovascular workout that also helps increase core and upper body strength.
- **Kayaking.** Hitting the water is a fun and unique way to enjoy exercise outdoors.
- **Yoga and Pilates.** Hit the mat for increased core strength and flexibility, plus improved movement!
- **Strength training.** Hit all major muscle groups two to three times per week.

If you are new to exercise, be sure to speak with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.

Healthy Aging: Productivity & Safety in the Workplace

Employees age 65 years and older are continuing in the workforce past retirement age in greater numbers. Recent projections by the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal that by 2022, 31.9% of those ages 65 to 74 still will be working. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) suggests these strategies for preparing your workplace for a healthier, safer, and more age-friendly workforce:

- **Match tasks to abilities.** Use self-paced work, self-directed rest breaks, and less repetitive tasks.
- **Avoid prolonged, sedentary work.** Consider sit/stand workstations and walking workstations.
- **Manage hazards.** These include noise, slip/trip hazards, and physical hazards.
- **Provide and design ergo-friendly work environments.** Workstations, tools, floor surfaces, adjustable seating, better illumination where needed, and screens and surfaces with less glare.
- **Utilize teams and teamwork strategies for aging-associated problem solving.** Workers closest to the problem are often best equipped to find the fix.
- **Provide health promotion and lifestyle interventions** including physical activity, healthy meal options, tobacco cessation assistance, risk factor reduction and screenings, coaching, and onsite medical care.
- **Invest in training and building worker skills** and competencies at all age levels. Help older employees adapt to new technologies, often a concern for employers and older workers.