

## 7 Brain Exercises to Strengthen Your Mind

AKA exercise for your mind

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### Mindful Meditation to Find Your Most Energetic Breath

While you might know that you need to exercise your body, did you know that it might also be important to exercise your mind? You've probably heard the old adage "[use it or lose it](#)." Many researchers do believe that this maxim applies to your brain health.

Brain exercises are activities that are designed to maintain and [strengthen cognitive abilities](#) such as working memory, processing speed, and [executive function](#). Just like your body, your mind needs regular exercise to stay in shape. Whether you are trying to boost your memory, improve your focus, or protect your brain from the effects of aging, incorporating some exercise for your mind can help ensure that it stays in peak condition.

Brain training is often touted as a way to sharpen your mind and even boost intelligence. A lot of cognitive scientists suggest that claims about the effects of brain training are often exaggerated and misleading. However, there is an abundance of research showing that how certain types of activities *can* be beneficial for your brain's health.<sup>1</sup>

So let's take a closer look at what at what effective exercise for your mind really looks like.

### Take Care of Your Body to Take Care of Your Mind



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If you want to take care of your mind, you need to start by taking care of your body.

Research has time and time again shown that people who engage in healthy behaviors such as exercise and proper nutrition are less susceptible to the cognitive declines associated with the aging process.

A 2023 study found that just 25 minutes a week of moderate-intensity exercise was correlated with larger brain volumes in multiple brain regions including total gray matter, white matter, hippocampus, frontal lobe, parietal lobe, and occipital lobe.<sup>2</sup>

The researchers suggest that exercise-related physical activity is associated with increased brain volumes. This may have neuroprotective effects and [protect your brain from shrinkage as it ages](#). Researchers have also found that exercise can promote [neurogenesis](#), or the formation of new brain cells, in the brain's hippocampus.<sup>3</sup> Other research has also found that physical activity is associated with a lower risk of dementia and [Alzheimer's disease](#).<sup>4</sup> Evidence also suggests that nutrition and other lifestyle factors like smoking and alcohol consumption also play a role in age-related changes in the brain.<sup>5</sup>

So if you want to build a better mind, start by working on your physical health first. Go for a walk, start incorporating more fresh fruits and vegetables into your diet, and try to give up any bad habits like [excessive alcohol consumption](#) or [tobacco use](#). Some of these might be more difficult than others, but your brain will thank you for years to come.

## [This Is Your Brain on Exercise](#)



Draw a Map of Your Town From Memory

Dave King / Dorling Kindersley / Getty Images

While you might feel like you can navigate the streets of your neighborhood with your eyes closed, try challenging your brain by actually drawing a map of your town or neighborhood from memory. No cheating!

## verywell mind

Try to include major streets, major side streets, and local landmarks.

Once you are done, compare your memory map to a real map of the area. How did you do? Are you surprised by some of the things that you missed? If you found this activity too easy, try drawing a less familiar area from memory, such as a map of the entire United States or Europe, and try to label every state or country.

Navigating your way to the supermarket or doctor's office might seem simple and almost automatic when you are behind the wheel of your car. However, forcing yourself to remember the layout of your neighborhood as well as draw and label it helps activate a variety of areas of your brain.

## Learn Something New



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This brain exercise requires a bit of commitment, but it is also one that just might give you the most bang for your buck. Learning something new is one way to keep your brain on its toes and continually introduce new challenges.

In one study, older adults spent 15 weeks learning new complex skills, like learning Spanish, using tech devices, and painting. At the end of the intervention, those who had spent time learning new skills experienced significant improvements on cognitive scores and increased their overall functional independence compared to the control group that had received no intervention.<sup>6</sup>

Such findings demonstrate that continuing to learn real-world skills can be a powerful form of exercise for the mind. Some things you might want to try include [learning a new language](#), learning to play a musical instrument, or learning a new hobby. Not only will you be stretching your mind, but you will also be continually learning something new as you keep expanding your skills and becoming more accomplished.

## Try Using Your Non-Dominant Hand



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Could something as simple as using your non-dominant hand be a good exercise for the mind? One neurobiologist suggests that it might help "keep your brain alive."

In his book *Keep Your Brain Alive: 83 Neurobic Exercises to Help Prevent Memory Loss and Increase Mental Fitness*, neurobiologist Lawrence Katz recommends using your non-dominant hand to strengthen your mind. Because using your opposite hand can be so challenging, it can be a great way to increase brain activity.<sup>7</sup>

Try switching hands while you are eating dinner or when you are trying to write something down. It will be difficult, but that is exactly the point. The most effective brain activities are those that are not necessarily easy.

## Socialize



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Studies from 2019 suggest that people who are socially active are also at a lower risk of developing dementia and Alzheimer's disease.<sup>8</sup>

[Socializing](#) tends to engage multiple areas of the brain and many social activities also include physical elements, such as playing a sport, that is also beneficial to your mind.

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Even if you are an inveterate [introvert](#), seeking social interactions can be beneficial to your brain in both the short and long term. Some ideas for staying socially engaged include:

- Signing up for volunteer opportunities in your community
- Joining a club
- Signing up for a local walking group
- Staying in close touch with your friends and family

## Meditate



John Lund/Tiffany Schoepp / Blend Images / Getty Images

One brain exercise you might not have considered might actually be extremely effective—meditation. Mindfulness meditation, in particular, is often espoused by [positive psychologists](#) for its beneficial effects.

Research suggests that [mindfulness](#) and meditation are associated with greater neuroplasticity, reduced brain aging, and improved cognitive abilities.<sup>9</sup>

If you're ready to try this brain exercise, you can read a [quick guide to practicing mindfulness meditation](#). You can also check out some handy tips for incorporating [mindfulness into your everyday life](#).

**FROM DEL:** I like to read my faith-based books, especially from Max Lucado. For me it is hard to take that meditation pose in a car. Prayer does wonderful me when I take the time for God.

## What About All Those Brain Training Games?



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Chances are probably pretty good that you've at least heard, or even tried, some of the many brain training games, websites, and apps that are out there. Many of these tools claim that these computerized brain exercises can increase your [mental flexibility](#), keep you mentally sharper as you age and even make you more intelligent.

While there is still plenty of debate about whether or not these claims are true, there is a chance that playing these types of mental games might be good for your brain.

How much exactly is still up for debate. If you think you would enjoy such games, you can find a [nice list of brain training resources](#) that you might want to check out.

If, however, you already spend too much time staring at your computer screen or smartphone, your time is probably much better well spent going out for a stroll, enjoying a new hobby or even visiting with a friend. All of these activities can have major long-term effects on the health and vitality of your brain.

**FROM DEL:** This is an interesting topic, with many different opinions. First, I suggest that you do not believe gaming websites that their product is the best to strengthen your brain by playing 10 minutes a day. This link is written by unbiased researchers from a new reputable website. I have NOT checked this person out personally, but I like this website because it is medically reviewed as well. There are additional suggestions about the amount of time playing games. I am guilty of playing on my phone, especially when I'm waiting for appointments, and it is easy to get side-tracked. Recently, I was chatting with a friend, who said she gave up Facebook searching when in bed at night. Research has shown the blue screen of the computer can interrupt sleep rhythms. I turn my off at 9:00PM each night. Unfortunately, I haven't kicked the habit of checking it in the morning before I have other important things done, like eye drops. I admit I spend a lot of time on the computer each day searching emails to find articles for you, but that is a labor of love. It is always good to evaluate ourselves and our behaviors before they control us. For example, I was having supper at my son's and I was checking my phone while I waited for supper. There were three others, with none of them on their phones. Opps.

**Link:** [7 Best Herbs for Memory and Brain Health](#)