

## Want to Think Better? Take Better Care of Your Brain

### Your Brain Is Your #1 Asset

Your brain is what powers your productivity. Even if you lose control of other parts of your body, as long as your brain is healthy, you can still be productive.

Steven Hawking, one of the world's most influential astrophysicists and cosmologists, lost control of his body due to a rare disease and is now wheelchair-bound. But the disease did not affect his brain. He can move only his eyes, but he can type one letter at a time with the aid of a machine that reads where his eyes are focused. So, in spite of being almost completely paralyzed, his healthy brain allows him to continue his research and write (one letter at a time) research articles and books that help us understand the structure and origin of the universe.

Many others who have lost limbs or suffer from debilitating diseases go on to live productive lives, in spite of their losses, because they still have a healthy brain. It makes sense to take good care of your brain.

### To Take Care of Your Brain, Take Care of Your Body

Everything you do that has an effect on your body has an effect on your brain.  
Everything you do that is good for your body is good for your brain.  
Everything you do that is *not* good for your body is *not* good for your brain!

Here are some examples:

#### When You Feed Your Body Well, You Feed Your Brain Well



When you eat fresh, non-processed food, you give your brain the nourishment it needs to help you think better. When you eat junk food, on the other hand, you send your brain junk that weakens its processing ability. Ever wonder why it's hard to concentrate after a Big Mac? Now you know. Your brain doesn't work well when it is fed junk.

#### When You Exercise Your Body, You Exercise Your Brain



Your brain needs a steady flow of oxygen-rich blood. When you move your body, even just standing up and stretching, you increase the flow of oxygen-rich blood to your brain. When you move a little, you get a little increase in blood flow to your brain. When you move a lot, you get a strong increase in blood flow to your brain.

Until the last 100 years, walking and being on our feet was common. The average person walked at least 7,000 steps a day, and many walked far more! Today, with all of the labor-saving devices, most of us do well to average 500 to 1500 steps a day.

Movement nourishes your brain; sitting is bad for your body and your brain to such an extent that the medical profession is beginning to call the diseases of old age the diseases of inactivity. Walk more! And when you walk, take the long-cut, not the short-cut.

### **Your Body Needs Rest and So Does Your Brain**



Scientists who study sleep and its effects on our brains recommend 6 -8 hours a night of restful sleep, preferably with about 6 hours of that sleep uninterrupted. Good sleep refreshes your brain. The problems you wrestled with yesterday look more manageable after a good night's sleep. And a good night's sleep is better for your brain than staying up to watch late-night TV.

### **Grow Your Brain**



It used to be conventional wisdom that we were born with a certain number of brain cells and that was the life-time supply. In addition, it was thought that as you aged your brain cells began dying off. That would mean that when enough brain cells died off, you got senile. We now know, however, that this is wrong!

Brain research in the last twenty years has clearly shown that our brains continue to grow new brain cells. How quickly or slowly we grow new brain cells depends a great deal on the lifestyle habits described above, and on the following suggestions for growing your brain.

### **Three Ways to Help Your Brain Grow and Work Better**

1. **Stretch your brain** – Give your brain something different to do. Learn a new language, learn to play a musical instrument, read more and, while you're at it, read to understand something new.
2. **Think more** – Instead of reacting immediately to a new idea or proposal, pause and give your brain time to examine it. What exactly is the issue? Flesh it out. What are the assumptions behind the issue? Who will it affect? What are its consequences? What unintended consequences could there be?
3. **Avoid multitasking** – Research on how the brain works strongly suggests that multitasking seldom produces results that are as good as addressing one task at a time. Our brains tend to work better when we slow down and give our full attention to one thing at a time.

## **The Bad News**

We all want the magic pill that will instantly make us smarter, think better and faster, and remember more efficiently. The bad news is that, as things stand now, there is no magic pill. There is no quick and easy way.

## **The Good News**

Making even slight improvement in your lifestyle habits can have remarkably positive effects on your brain health and function, and therefore on your productivity!

Let's be clear: improving lifestyle habits and establishing new brain growth habits takes effort. Improvement comes slowly, over time, and it's easy to get discouraged and fall back into old habits.

When that happens, remind yourself that falling back just means that more effort is required. Hit it again and again until your new lifestyle habit is firmly established. This isn't rocket science. It is persistence, which is just another word for work. And you know how to work.

It pays to remind yourself, from time to time, about who benefits the most from your efforts to help your brain grow: it's you! The better your brain health, the more productive you will be in all areas of your life.

## **Final Thought**

Most of us take better care of our dogs than we do of our brains. How smart is that?