



## Brain is Like a Muscle

You rely on your brain for everything. No matter what you are doing, your brain is probably getting a workout. While your brain is actually an organ, it plays a huge role in controlling your muscles, and it benefits from the same lifestyle habits your muscles receive. You should train and flex your brain like you do a muscle.

Your brain controls and facilitates the movement of your body, your senses, thinking and reasoning, processing of emotions, stores memory, and controls vital functions like your heart rate and respiration.

Just as some muscle loss is part of the aging process, relative deterioration of the brain is natural as you age. Lifestyle choices do play a significant role in the aging process by either accelerating these changes or slowing them down. Certain diseases and disorders, injury, infections, and alcohol use can also cause the brain to shrink.

So, how does exercise impact your brain? First, it can **help you remember**. Aerobic exercise – like walking/jogging, biking, and gardening – may help the hippocampus in your brain grow. This is the part of the brain that is linked to memory and learning. Activity may also slow the shrinking of your hippocampus, reducing memory loss as you get older. According to some studies, the regrowth is even stronger if you like the activity you are doing, so find something you enjoy!

**Exercise can make your brain more flexible.** Younger brains tend to have more ability to change when learning and experiencing new things. Both aerobic exercise and weight training seem to improve brain flexibility. Exercise can also improve your brain's **ability to organize and interpret information** so that it makes sense. Just one exercise session can start this process and continuing regular activity long term helps your brain cells connect.

Regular physical activity can help ease symptoms of depression and anxiety, possibly because it slows the damage and breakdown of brain cells.

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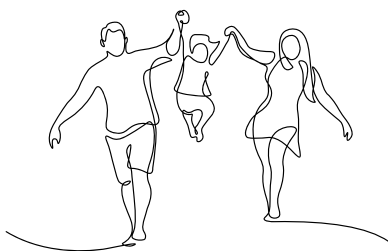
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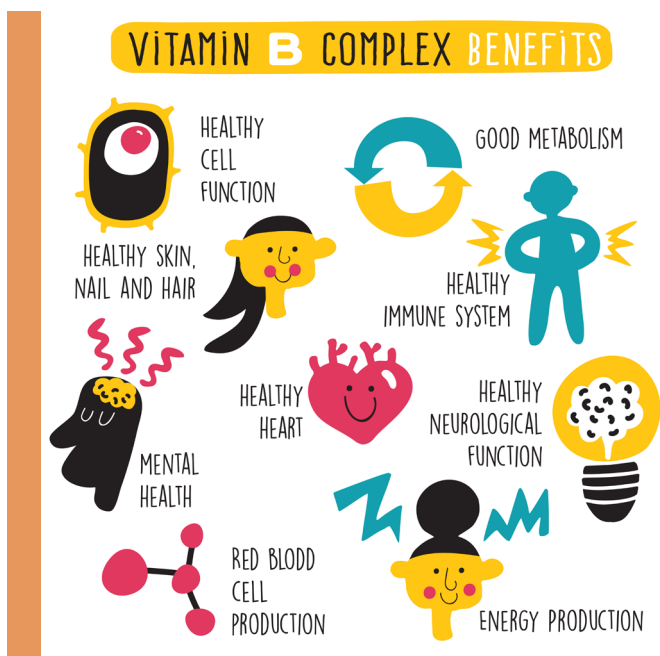
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When you elevate your heart rate through exercise, it helps with blood flow. Exercise makes your heart and blood vessels stronger, and improves blood flow. This appears to help stop the buildup of plaques linked to dementia and helps nourish the brain to slow mental decline. Exercise can also help you sleep better, getting more of the type of sleep that helps revitalize your brain and body.

So, while you may have approached exercise to stay physically fit, you now have another important reason – to improve brain function. If you are interested in learning more about this connection between activity and brain function, this TED Talk provides a great overview. [https://www.ted.com/talks/wendy\\_suzuki\\_the\\_brain\\_changing\\_benefits\\_of\\_exercise?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/wendy_suzuki_the_brain_changing_benefits_of_exercise?language=en)



## Exercise Snacks for Big Benefits

No, we're not talking about food! An exercise snack is a short, easy form of exercise to integrate movement into your daily life. The goal is to make short bursts of activity throughout your day a part of your lifestyle. Research suggests that brief bouts of activity can be better than a long period of structured exercise, especially if that exercise is followed by a full day of sitting.

Think of small ways you can weave in activity throughout your day. Mow your lawn with a push mower, make bread and knead by hand, push a vacuum cleaner instead of pushing a vacuum robot button, park further away in a parking lot, and take the stairs whenever you can. You get the idea!

## B Vitamins Boost Brain Power

Your body needs 13 essential vitamins and 8 of these are B vitamins, which include: thiamine (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3), pantothenic acid (B5), pyridoxine (B6), biotin (B7), folate (B9), and cobalamin (B12).

The B vitamin group plays many roles in the function of your body. First, these water soluble vitamins help enzymes (which break down what you eat and drink) release energy from food and move oxygen and energy around your body. They also help cells grow and multiply and help improve your immune function.

Through research, we also know that B vitamins support just about every aspect of brain health. They can help prevent or delay cognitive decline and memory loss and diseases such as Alzheimer's. Research also suggests that B vitamins can improve your performance with tests that involve memory, problem-solving, and word and sentence formation. The B vitamins also affect mental stability, mood, and your ability to cope with stress, and they appear to play roles in reducing heart disease and some types of cancer.

While many foods contain B vitamins, they are easily destroyed by alcohol and cooking. Processing of food removes some of B vitamins, and a few examples of this include white flour, white bread, and white rice. Since your body is not able to store all B vitamins, it is important that you get them continuously through what you eat.

A good source of B vitamins is whole grains, such as brown rice, barley, and millet. Eggs are another good source and so are legumes, a group which includes beans, lentils, and garbanzo beans. Leafy greens, citrus fruits, nuts, avocados, and mushrooms contribute B vitamins. Meat, poultry, and fish are excellent sources of vitamin B3, B6, and B12, and liver contributes thiamine and folate. Many types of breakfast cereals are also fortified with various B vitamins. The best way to get B vitamins is through your diet, so take a supplement only if your doctor recommends it.

By eating a varied and balanced diet, you should be able to meet the needs your body has for all of these very important B vitamins.

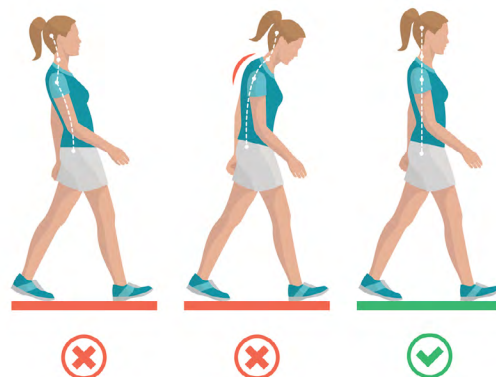


## Walking Technique Matters

Walking seems simple, right? By improving your walking technique, you can get more benefits. Start by checking your posture and picture this — you should be able to draw a straight line from your ear down to your shoulder, to your hip, knee, and ankle. Tighten your stomach muscles and tuck your pelvis under your torso.

When walking, move your shoulders naturally and freely and avoid drawing your shoulders toward your ears. Swing your arms with each step, bending arms at the elbow, and use your arms to power forward and increase your pace. This helps you burn more calories, increase upper body strength, and helps reduce swelling, tingling, and numbness of the fingers or hands.

Your stride should feel natural. Land on your heels and then roll forward to push off with your toes. After you walk leisurely for a few minutes to warm up, increase your pace to achieve an intensity where you can just barely talk.



## Tuscan Veggie Chicken Stew

Makes 6 Servings

### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive or canola oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups carrots, chopped
- 3 cups celery, chopped
- 1 large zucchini, chopped
- 1 sweet red bell pepper, chopped
- ¼ cup flour
- 4 cups low sodium chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, optional
- 1 19-ounce can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/ 28-ounce can diced tomatoes (and juice)
- 1 cup diced cooked chicken breast
- 1 cup fresh spinach leaves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh parsley and parmesan cheese for garnish



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### Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Rinse produce by gently rubbing under cold running water.
3. In a large pot over medium high heat, add the oil and then add onion, garlic, carrots, and celery. Sauté for 4 to 5 minutes, until tender and fragrant. Stir in the zucchini and red pepper and cook for another 2 minutes until slightly softened.
4. Sprinkle in the flour to create a roux and cook for another minute. Slowly add 1 cup of the chicken broth while stirring continuously until mixture starts to thicken. Then add the remaining chicken broth and stir.
5. Add the Italian seasoning, red pepper flakes (optional), beans, and tomatoes. Bring to a boil, stirring frequently, then add the chicken and reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered for 25 to 30 minutes.
6. Stir in spinach and vinegar and cook an additional 4 to 5 minutes until everything is heated through.
7. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve hot with fresh parsley and parmesan cheese if desired.

**Nutrition Information per serving:** 280 calories; 7 g fat; 38 g carbohydrates; 18 g protein; 11 g fiber; 540 mg sodium; 10 g sugar.

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