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Reclaim Your Brain

BY STAFF REPORTS

Nine simple steps you can start doing today.

Step 1

Focus every day only on those things you can control

Chronic distress can lead to elevated levels of stress hormones, such as cortisol, that suppress your immune system and, in turn, make you more vulnerable to getting sick. But realis-

tic, doable challenges actually help boost your acute-stress system as you release neurotransmitters into your synapses that activate your brain. It also pumps adrenaline into the bloodstream, which gears you up for the task.

Step 2

Set your biological clock to the right time

Set your body clock by getting up at the same time every day, no matter what time you go to sleep. Also, the simplest thing you can do to set and maintain your brain's clock to the right time is to give your brain access to the light-dark cycle that nature provides. Go to bed with your curtains open.

Step 3

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables

Colorful fruits and vegetables provide antioxidants that bathe your brain cells and other cells. For every day that you don't get at least five portions of fruits and vegetables, take a multivitamin.

Step 4

Keep in mind the 60/60 rule

Your brain's neurotransmission and hormonal signals depend on the amino acids in protein, so get at least 60 grams a day if you are an average-size adult—and no more than 60 grams of total fat. All enzymes in the brain that synthesize the neurotransmitters from amino acids are big proteins—so are the channels for the sodium, potassium and calcium ions that keep the electricity flowing through your neuropathways.

Step 5

Drink to your health

Milk contains many things you need. Its fluid content helps to maintain the right concentrations of electrolytes, such as sodium and potassium, for the electricity

that flows in your brain. Milk's calcium is critical for release of the neurotransmitters needed for communication from one neuron in your brain to the next. And the whole protein that milk provides contains all the essential amino acids.

Caffeine can provide short-term benefits to increasing speed and accuracy of cognitive processes as well as enhance a sense of well-being. Recent data also point to antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activities of caffeine.

Step 6 **Get physical**

Physical exercise reduces stress and stimulates your neuroendocrine system in a healthy way. Exercise your heart and lungs with aerobic exercise at least three or four times each week. Do fun exercise such as biking, hiking, swimming or gardening.

Step 7 **Get a mental or social workout**

Stay engaged mentally, socially and intellectually. Keep up with current events, but avoid tabloid sources that spoon-feed sensational and distressing (depressing) information.

Step 8 **Appreciate the big picture**

Cognitive therapy is built on the idea that it's not what you have, who you are or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It's what you think about. Logging sincere thoughts of gratitude in a journal has been found to diminish physical symptoms as well as increase mood and optimism.

Step 9 **Keep healthy**

Try to stay away from doctors and hospitals unless you are in treatment, need urgent medical care or want preventive care. Ask yourself if what's ailing you is something you can control with lifestyle changes instead of going to a doctor or hospital where you may be exposed to other illnesses.

Adapted with permission by Kathy LaTour from Your Brain After Chemo: A Practical Guide to Lifting the Fog and Getting Back Your Focus by Dan Silverman, MD, PhD, and Idelle Davidson.