



# mind

*quench your thirst  
for knowledge*

## Keeping your mind active

We all know the expression “use it or lose it.” We understand how important it is to stay physically active to keep our bodies healthy and strong. But what about our minds?

If we’re not careful, we may find ourselves coasting along without giving our brains a workout—and this mental inactivity can mean we become the intellectual equivalent of couch potatoes.

It’s easy to forget how incredibly mysterious and complex our brains are. They are more than just handy tools that let us perform routine actions — they allow us to make the complicated emotional judgements and perform the feats of higher reasoning that distinguish us from other animals. Our brains contain our thoughts, memories and hopes for the future. They’re what make us human.

Something that precious needs to be taken care of. There are many things we can do to keep our brains in shape — regular physical exercise and good nutrition each play a part, as do sufficient sleep and adequate relaxation. But perhaps the most important thing you can do for your brain is to challenge it.

Your brain contains billions of nerve cells, called neurons, that communicate with each other. Like a river cutting a pathway through rock, over time our thought processes tend to follow the same nerve channels. By changing our habits and taking on new and challenging activities, we can force the neurons in our brains to make new connections, tapping into the enormous potential that lies within our own minds.

We can challenge our brains in many different ways: by taking on new responsibilities at work, for example, or by engaging in a friendly debate with a loved one about a subject that interests us. But for most of us, the area of our lives that allows the most scope for improved mental stimulation is the way in which we spend our leisure time.

Make a point of taking part in leisure activities that provide a mental workout — anything that engages your mind and forces you to think. This doesn’t necessarily mean something highly involved or complicated — it could be as simple as learning a new

skill, taking language classes, or reading about the latest discoveries in fields such as science, medicine and technology

Try doing crosswords or other word puzzles. Or, if you're partial to cards or board games, try playing mentally stimulating games such as bridge or chess. Trivia games that force you to search your memory for long-forgotten information are also good.

Certain hobbies may have hidden aspects that increase their beneficial impact on your brain. Stamp collecting, for example. On the surface, it involves little more than purchasing and arranging multi-coloured bits of paper. But stamps can tell us an enormous amount about the countries that produced them, and the stories of the people and events they commemorate. By inspiring us to find out about the stories that surround them, stamps can help us keep our minds in shape.

In addition to mental exercise, you should also give your brain the benefit of a regular physical workout. You don't have to be in training for the next Olympics — even relatively gentle activities can be beneficial. Try walking, which pumps up your circulation and increases the oxygen supply to your brain.

Some physical activities that involve concentration (such as tai chi, yoga, and certain types of choreographed aerobics and dance classes) do double duty — they help your body work off stress while keeping your mind occupied. For an added brain boost, change your activities regularly, and always be prepared to try something new.

Try to avoid spending too much time on activities that require only passive attention and fail to engage your brain in an interactive fashion. The more challenges you give your mind, the more likely you are to maintain a fit and healthy brain for many years to come.