



# Your Brain on Exercise Smorgasbord Challenge

A Fun and Engaging Fitness Challenge for All Levels

March 13 - 19, 2023

“Where are my car keys?” and “Where are my reading glasses?” Does this sound familiar? Memory loss is the most significant risk factor of aging. Most of us will experience some loss of memory in our 70’s and 80’s, but some may start to notice it as early as their 50’s. Memory loss can be a symptom of dementia which can be defined as the inability to think as well as you used to. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia which refers to degradation in thinking, caused by old age, that can affect your daily function.<sup>(1)</sup>

Here’s the good news, regular physical activity benefits the brain! Multiple research studies show that physically active people are less likely to experience a decline in brain function and have a lower risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease. Physical activity can improve your cognitive health, helping you think, learn, problem-solve, and enhance mood. It can improve memory and reduce anxiety or depression. But you don’t have to be a fitness zealot to reap the benefits. Any amount of physical activity will make a difference. No matter your age or fitness level, physical activity can help improve sleep, brain health, and quality of life.<sup>(2)</sup>

## Highlights

- Complete the waiver form included and submit to Mary Harrington BEFORE you begin the program
- In order to earn a prize, you must complete 150 minutes of exercise throughout the week. You can break this up however you like, as long as it totals 150 mins by the end of the week. You can certainly do more if you wish.
- Complete the log/prize form attached (only MIIA/Blue Cross members are eligible for prizes)
- Return prize form to Mary Harrington, mharrington@mma.org, by April 11, 2023

# Your Brain on Exercise



## How does exercise benefit the brain?

Part of the reason exercise enhances brain function is due to blood flow. Research shows that when we exercise, blood pressure and blood flow increase everywhere in the body, including the brain. More blood means more energy and oxygen, which makes our brain perform better.<sup>(3)</sup> Aerobic activity reliably shows structural changes in the hippocampus. The hippocampus is a part of the brain involved with memory as well as stress regulation. Increased volume and activity of the hippocampus leads to increased processing speed which means you can think faster and switch between tasks.<sup>(4)</sup> As a result, you can perform better at work, learn new skills quicker, and make smarter decisions.

## How can exercise relieve anxiety and depression?

There are several explanations, some chemical, others behavioral. Exercise reduces levels of the body's stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. It also increases neurotransmitters like dopamine, serotonin, and noradrenaline that can improve mood and lessen depression and anxiety. Behavioral factors also contribute to the emotional benefits of exercise. As strength and stamina increase, self-image and self-confidence will improve. Renewed energy will help you succeed in many tasks, and the habit of regular exercise will help you achieve other important lifestyle goals.<sup>(5)</sup>

## How much and what type of exercise?

Most adults should get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity weekly. This can be broken into 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Some examples of beneficial exercises include walking, cycling, dancing, swimming, yard work, house cleaning, actively playing with children, golfing, and hiking. Muscle strengthening is an important aspect in maintaining a healthy body and should not be ignored. Center for Disease Control states that stronger muscles help reduce the risk of falling and improve the abilities to perform the daily tasks of life. Carrying heavy shopping bags, yoga, Pilates, and doing exercises that use our own body weight like squats, lunges, and push-ups can help make our muscles strong. In addition to improving brain health, following these recommendations for physical activity can help you sleep and feel better, lose weight, reduce your risk of 20 chronic health conditions including heart disease and some cancers, and add years to your life.<sup>(6)</sup>

## References:

1. [Mayo Clinic](#)
2. [CDC.gov](#)
3. [Scientific American](#)
4. [NCBI.NIM.NIH.gov](#)
5. [Harvard Health](#)
6. [Whole Brain Health](#)

# Your Brain on Exercise



## Here are some ideas for making exercise a habit:

1. **Do what you like!** You don't have to go to the gym. Walk, ride, dance, or swim! Doing something you enjoy will change your outlook toward exercise.
2. **The MIIA Video library** has many recorded exercise classes on demand at: <https://www.emiia.org/well-aware/resources?category=16>  
  
Also, **OmPractice** offers a variety of free, live classes for municipal employees. Go to: <https://app.ompractice.com/memberships/miia>
3. **Change it up!** No matter how much you enjoy your workout, if you keep doing the same thing over and over, you will get bored. Keep trying different activities or change the location. Instead of always going to the gym, do something outdoors.
4. **Schedule exercise into your day!** So often other things and people take priority over our time for exercise. Set a particular time for exercise and treat it as an appointment.
5. **Take baby steps!** Often when we start exercising, we tend to overdo it. This puts a lot of stress on the body and makes it less likely we will continue. It's better to start with 15-20 minutes, take it slow and gradually increase time and intensity.
6. **Find a workout buddy!** Research shows that when we exercise with someone else, we are more likely to do it. This makes you more accountable to each other and will help you stick to a routine.
7. **Set a goal!** Setting a goal can keep us motivated to continue. For example, maybe you want to walk a 5K this spring or participate in a charity ride with friends. Goal setting will help you be accountable to yourself.
8. **Go shopping!** Buy some clothes just for your workouts. Wearing something that feels good will set a positive attitude toward the activity. Also, the right set of clothes and shoes can help prevent injuries.
9. **Focus on frequency and not performance!** There will be days when you don't feel like doing anything, those are the days you should do something. Exercise will give you more energy and improve your mood. Even a 10-minute walk will help you feel better. Your body and brain will thank you!

# Your Brain on Exercise Log Form



Write your daily exercises in the appropriate column. Total the minutes in the last column. In order to earn a prize, you must complete 150 minutes of exercise throughout the week. You can break this up however you like, as long as it totals 150 mins by the end of the week. You can certainly do more if you wish. Return log form to Mary Harrington at mharrington@mma.org OR mail to Mary at MIIA, 3 Center Plaza, Suite 610, Boston, MA 02108 by April 11, 2023. All log forms must be unique in the case where a spouse or dependent is also participating. Only MIIA /BCBS members can earn prizes.

Date	Cardio	Strength	Total Minutes
<i>Example: March 13</i>	Biking (40 minutes)	Push-ups/Sit-ups (5 minutes)	45
Total Minutes for the Week			

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ MIIA/BCBS subscriber:  Yes  No

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Prize choice. Choose 1st and 2nd choices. If you don't specify, we will choose your prize. [Click](#) to view below prizes. Can also view at [emiia.org](http://emiia.org). Click on Well Aware, then click on Incentives. Only MIIA/BCBS members eligible for prizes.

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chill Watch - White, Black, Red, Cyan | <input type="checkbox"/> Nature Sound Spa      | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardener's Kit                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fleece Blanket (navy)                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor headlamp      | <input type="checkbox"/> Glass Leakproof Storage Container  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freezable Lunch tote                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Vodapod Water bottle  | <input type="checkbox"/> Kitchen shears                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collapsible cooler                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Rivage Weekender tote | <input type="checkbox"/> Pedova soft bound journal          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yoga mat                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Pickleball Set        | <input type="checkbox"/> La Cuisine silicon baking utensils |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sinus soother                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Bamboo cutting board  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bike repair kit                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Shaker bottle         |   |

Open to all employees, only MIIA/BCBS members are eligible for prizes.

# Assumption Of Risk And Release



## Your Brain on Exercise

I, the undersigned, certify that I am in good physical health and able to participate in all of the activities of the above- named program. In particular, I certify that:

1. A doctor or other health professional has never told me that I should not do mild to moderate exercise.
2. I do not feel pain in my chest when I do physical activity.
3. I do not lose my balance due to dizziness and I have never lost consciousness.
4. I do not have a bone or joint problem (for example, back, knee or hip) that could be made worse by a change in my physical activity.
5. I am not aware of any other reason why I should not do physical activity.

I acknowledge that the instructor (if applicable) for the above-named program has described for me the activities that I can expect to be performing as part of the program, that I have been provided an opportunity to ask questions about the program, and that any questions I have asked have been answered to my full satisfaction. (Questions may be called in or emailed to Courtney Hernandez, Wellness Manager, [chernandez@mma.org](mailto:chernandez@mma.org), or 617-426-7272.).

I understand and acknowledge that there are inherent dangers and risks associated with participation in any form of an exercise program or exercise testing which can include, among other things, dizziness, fainting, falls, muscular and skeletal injuries, and cardiac or respiratory conditions. I further understand that MIIA and the MIIA Health Benefits Trust do not indemnify individuals with respect to injuries or other liabilities arising out of participation in the above- named program. I hereby agree to assume all risks and responsibilities surrounding my participation in the above-named program. I have read and understand any and all written materials setting forth the requirements for participation in the above-named program, as well as those explained by the instructor(s) (where applicable), and I agree to strictly observe them. Further, I do for myself, my heirs, executors, and administrators hereby accept full responsibility for my participation and agree to indemnify, release and discharge the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association, the MIIA Health Benefits Trust and above named instructor (where applicable), as well as their officers, employees, trustees, agents, attorneys and assigns from any and all claims or actions for property damage, personal injury, and/or death arising from such participation in the above-named program or growing out of or caused by any acts or omissions during my participation in the above-named program.

I further acknowledge that my participation in the above-named program is voluntary and that neither my Employer nor any other party has required my participation in this program or has induced me in any way to participate in this program.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Employer \_\_\_\_\_