



Be Brain Savvy

A 2-week Self- Directed Smorgasbord Challenge

July 11 to 24, 2022

We hear lots of talk about brain health, whether it be staving off dementia or preventing Alzheimer's disease. There has been extensive research in the area of brain health and we know multiple ways to keep our brain healthy. The trick, however, is to practice the tactics early and often – it's much harder to reverse dementia once it has begun.

Take this 2-week challenge to "exercise" your brain – and please keep exercising it even after the challenge is over!

To earn a prize you must complete at least 10 of the Brain Savvy activities offered in this challenge. No registration is necessary. Return your completed log and prize forms to Mary Harrington at mharrington@mma.org or mail to MIIA, 3 Center Plaza, Suite 610, Boston, MA 02108 by August 8, 2022 to be eligible for prizes (only MIIA/BCBS members are eligible for prizes).

Be Brain Savvy Activity Challenge



Being Brain Savvy can be broken down into 4 lifestyle components: diet, exercise, sleep, and managing stress.

DIET

Your diet should focus on foods to fight inflammation, oxidative stress and cognitive decline. Much of the damage to our brain that leads to cognitive decline comes from inflammation and oxidative stress. Inflammation in the brain contributes to cognitive decline, general “fogginess” and also influences mood and motivation.

Here are some powerhouse **foods to include**:

Salmon or other fatty fish – They are high in omega-3 fatty acids, which have been associated with reduced cognitive decline. An increased fish consumption shows a reduced Alzheimer’s Risk.

Olive Oil – A study in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease showed that extra virgin olive oil may improve memory and learning. In particular, the Mediterranean diet and consumption of its main component, the extra-virgin olive oils (EVOOs) have been linked to better visual memory, verbal fluency, and decreased risk of developing dementia and Alzheimer’s disease (AD).

Berries – Berries are loaded with anti-oxidants, which help fight oxidative stress.

Lentils – B vitamins can slow the shrinking of the brain that’s associated with Alzheimer’s disease — and these little legumes are packed with those vitamins.

Kale – Kale is nutritional powerhouse. It contains 45 different kinds of flavonoids, which have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that may clear the cobwebs out of your brain. Plus, it has lots of vitamin K, which boosts memory.

Walnuts – Eating a small handful of walnuts per day may help boost memory, concentration and the speed at which your brain processes information.

Green Tea – Any list that includes antioxidant-rich foods also needs to include this beverage. Researchers from the University of Michigan have found that an element in green tea helps stop plaque growth in the brain that’s connected to Alzheimer’s disease.

Dark Chocolate – A recent study involving cocoa drinks showed that those who received the high concentrations of cocoa showed improvements in tests of visual attention, task switching and improvements in verbal fluency.

Most experts now recommend about 1 ounce per day of chocolate that is 70 – 85% cocoa.

Be Brain Savvy Activity Challenge



Here are some food and beverages **to avoid**:

Sugar and Trans fats – Eating too much sugar can cause memory and cognitive deficiencies. Check food labels to see where sugar appears in the ingredient list. The further down the list the better! Processed foods usually contain lots of added sugars, trans fats, and additives. These ingredients can interfere with cognition and memory. Avoid foods that include “partially hydrogenated” in the ingredient list. This means the product contains trans fats. Research supports that trans fats have a negative effect on the brain and cardiovascular health.

Too Much Alcohol – In a long-term study, it was determined that alcohol intake shrank the part of the brain associated with memory and reasoning. Those who had the equivalent of four or more drinks a day had almost six times the risk of developing dementia as did nondrinkers. The recommendation is 1 serving of alcohol per day for women, and 2 servings per day for men.

A serving of alcohol equals:

- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits
- 5 ounces of wine
- 12 ounces of beer

EXERCISE

Exercise is good for so many things, including brain health. Here are just a few highlights:

Exercise improves mood and balances neurotransmitter function.

It increases:

- GABA (the anti-anxiety neurotransmitter)
- Serotonin (the happy neurotransmitter)
- Dopamine (the energizing neurotransmitter)

It decreases:

- Cortisol (the stress hormone)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that older adults get 150 minutes of moderately intense aerobic exercise each week, which is five 30-minute workouts.

But the biggest boost in brain health in numerous studies was linked to sessions of 45 to 60 minutes of continuous exercise.

If that seems daunting, start with a few minutes a day, and increase the amount you exercise by five or 10 minutes every week until you reach your goal.

And remember, some exercise is always better than no exercise!

Be Brain Savvy Activity Challenge



SLEEP

Sleep is essential to our health and well-being. A sleep deprived brain increases cortisol, the stress hormone, making you feel tired and more stressed the next day. Also, sleep deprivation leads to:

- A decrease in productivity and decision-making
- Impaired memory and cognitive brain function
- Reduction in reaction time and motor skills
- Impaired vision
- Exaggerated emotions or moods

One sleepless night affects your brain in the same way as being drunk!

A large disrupter of good sleep is the blue light emitted from our devices such as TVs, computers, smart phones, and tablets. More than 80% of Americans report using digital devices in the hour before going to sleep which has been shown to disrupt sleep patterns by increasing alertness to the brain. Blue light suppresses the natural release of melatonin, the "sleep hormone", disrupting sleep. Strategies to limit exposure to blue light include:

- Use dim red or green lights for night lights
- Avoid looking at bright screens beginning two to three hours before bed
- If working a night shift or using a lot of electronic devices at night, wear blue-blocking glasses
- Use apps or features on computers that alter the blue wavelength at night

Turning lights down is a signal to the brain to release melatonin and encourages sleepiness. Relaxation breathing or light stretching before bed can be helpful for encouraging sleep.

UNMANAGED STRESS

Chronic stress triggers long term changes in brain structure and function. A build-up of the "stress hormone", cortisol, increases the risk for depression, mental illness, and lower life expectancy. Additionally, chronic high levels of cortisol can interfere with learning and memory.

Also, recent research has shown that loneliness can contribute to cognitive decline. People who have larger social networks were 26% less likely to develop dementia than the participants with smaller social circles.

Simple ways to manage stress, lower cortisol levels, and boost brain power include:

- Regular Physical Activity - 20 to 30 minutes of activity most days of the week can "burn" up cortisol
- Mindfulness Meditation - any type of meditation will reduce anxiety and lower cortisol levels. Take 10 deep breathes and feel your body decompress
- Social Connectivity - make an effort to spend time with loved ones. The "tend and befriend" response increases oxytocin (pleasure hormone) and decreases cortisol (stress hormone)
- Laughter and Levity - having fun and laughing reduces cortisol levels
- Music - listening to music has been shown to improve mood and reduce stress

In summary, lowering your cortisol levels as a result of engaging in these behaviors can build a better brain!

Be Brain Savvy Activity Challenge



Be Brain Savvy Activities

Complete AT LEAST 10 of the Brain Savvy activities provided to earn a prize. Each activity can only be done once.

1. Complete a day with no added sugars
2. Drink at least 8 ounces of fresh brewed green tea
3. Eat at least 4 ounces of salmon
4. Enjoy a day without alcohol
5. Choose packaged foods that only contain ingredients you can pronounce easily
6. Check ingredient lists and choose only those products that do NOT include any form of sugar in the first 5 ingredients
7. Engage in a minimum of 30 minutes of activity
8. Choose lentils as a lunch or side-dish for dinner
9. Make a kale salad or kale smoothie, using at least one cup of uncooked kale
10. Practice mindfulness meditation for 10 minutes
11. Spend time with friends in person, not on the phone or on Zoom
12. Volunteer in community groups and causes
13. Join a book, bridge, or walking club
14. Watch a funny movie or a comedy special
15. Avoid "blue" light from smart phones, tablets, and computers 2 hours before sleep
16. Do not drink alcohol within 2 hours of bedtime
17. Do some relaxation breathing or light stretching before bed
18. Keep a sleep journal and note the conditions under which you slept the best
19. Enjoy 1-2 ounces of at least 70% dark chocolate
20. Have a handful of walnuts for a snack or on a salad
21. Eat at least a cup of berries, like blueberries, strawberries, blackberries or raspberries.
They can be fresh or frozen. On cereal in the morning, or in a smoothie,
or sprinkled on a salad with dinner.

Be Brain Savvy – Activity Log Form

July 11 – July 24, 2022



No registration necessary. Please complete the following log and prize form in full. Return it to Mary Harrington at mharrington@mma.org OR mail to Mary at MIIA, 3 Center Plaza, Suite 610, Boston, MA 02108 by August 8, 2022. Complete AT LEAST 10 of the Brain Savvy activities provided to earn a prize. **Each activity can only be done once.** Every time you complete an activity, check the box that coincides with it marking it as “complete”. Please also note the date the activity was completed. All log forms must be unique in the case where a spouse or dependent is also participating.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 1. Complete a day with no added sugars | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 12. Volunteer in community groups and causes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 2. Drink at least 8 ounces of fresh brewed green tea | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 13. Join a book, bridge, or walking club |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 3. Eat at least 4 ounces of salmon | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 14. Watch a funny movie or a comedy special |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 4. Enjoy a day without alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 15. Avoid “blue” light from smart phones, tablets, and computers 2 hours before sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 5. Choose packaged foods that only contain ingredients you can pronounce easily | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 16. Do not drink alcohol within 2 hours of bedtime |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 6. Check ingredient lists and choose only those products that do NOT include any form of sugar in the first 5 ingredients | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 17. Do some relaxation breathing or light stretching before bed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 7. Engage in a minimum of 30 minutes of activity | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 18. Keep a sleep journal and note the conditions under which you slept the best |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 8. Choose lentils as a lunch or side-dish for dinner | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 19. Enjoy 1-2 ounces of at least 70% dark chocolate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 9. Make a kale salad or kale smoothie, using at least one cup of uncooked kale | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 20. Have a handful of walnuts for a snack or on a salad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 10. Practice mindfulness meditation for 10 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 21. Eat at least a cup of berries, like blueberries, strawberries, blackberries or raspberries. They can be fresh or frozen. On cereal in the morning, or in a smoothie, or sprinkled on a salad with dinner. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ 11. Spend time with friends in person, not on the phone or on Zoom | |

Name _____ Employer _____

MIIA/BCBS subscriber: Yes No

Email _____ Phone _____

Mailing address _____

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. Click on Well Aware, then click on Incentives. Only MIIA/BCBS members eligible for prizes.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nature Sound Spa | <input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-massage balls (set of 2) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pet Lovers travel kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Zuma cooler backpack | <input type="checkbox"/> Salad and Pasta Pals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor headlamp | <input type="checkbox"/> Fleece Blanket | <input type="checkbox"/> Sinus Soother |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slope Messenger Bag | <input type="checkbox"/> Oven mitt | <input type="checkbox"/> Under Armour® 24 oz. Dominate Water Bottle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wind chimes | <input type="checkbox"/> Hand warmers (package of 10) | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflector Vest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> VODAPOD 32-ounce Water Bottle with Time Marker | <input type="checkbox"/> Bamboo cutting board | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insulated cotton cooler lunch tote | <input type="checkbox"/> Collapsible strainer | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shake it work out bottle | <input type="checkbox"/> Camper 34 oz. Stainless Steel Vacuum Container | |

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