

# champs

Center for Healthy Aging Ministries, Programs & Services

## ***FROM THE CHAMPS PARISH NURSE***

### **Exercise for Your Brain**

With May being Mental Health Month it is good to remind people who want to maintain or improve the health of their brain that they should focus on a number of factors: stay physically active, keep your mind active, be socially involved, get adequate rest, recognize and treat yourself as special, function within your limits (say “no” sometimes), learn to ask others for help and take time daily for prayer.

**Physical activity.** Although the mechanisms whereby physical activity stimulates the brain are not thoroughly understood it is known that exercise can encourage a healthy brain to function optimally. For example, exercise can help the brain by promoting the production of new neurons (brain cells) and strengthening the connections between neurons.

- Exercise encourages the flow of oxygenated blood to the brain thereby enhances the transmission of messages to and from the brain.
- Exercise stimulates chemicals in the brain that are known as endorphins.
- Endorphins are known as “natural painkillers” that aid in the reduction of stress and are thought to postpone aging.

**Eat a balanced diet.** The body needs a variety of foods eaten in the right portions to maintain health. (See [www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid/index.aspx](http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid/index.aspx), to develop a specific food plan based on your height, weight and age) Many B vitamins are vital to normal brain and nerve function. It is also thought that a low-fat diet and foods rich in omega-3s might also be helpful in delaying the onset of dementia.

**Keep your mind active.** Push your brain beyond its comfort zone or to compare it with physical exercise get it to sweat.

- Learn a new hobby, learn to use a computer, take up art, and do crossword puzzles, board games, Sudoku, or other equally challenging games. Invite a friend over for Bible Trivia.
- Take slow deep breaths and exhale slowly. This will stimulate the hypothalamus and pineal gland which are involved in the optimum performance of both physical and mental health.

**Social activity.** Over and over articles on successful aging include the importance of staying connected to others as imperative to one’s health and well being.

- Visit with friends, neighbors and family.
- Volunteer for your church or favorite charity. There is great value in touching the lives of others as a positive intervention for your own health.
- Do things you love with others.

**Rest.** Sleep is essential for restoration and maintenance of bodily functions.

- Too many naps in the daytime or too much caffeine, alcohol and nicotine can interfere with ones sleep. Always use your bed only for sleeping, not to watch TV or read. Otherwise, your TV show is over or the book I propped on your chest and you have had another “nap.”
- A high alcohol intake can interfere with normal sleep patterns affecting moods.
- Try to maintain a regular schedule for going to bed and getting up each day.
- Make sure the room temperature is comfortable and the surroundings conducive to sleep-try some soft music or aroma therapy.

**Treat yourself as special.** Be your own best friend.

- Indulge yourself with a massage, a long restful tub bath with candles, a golf game with friends, bowling, day trips, quilting, fishing or woodworking. Do something you love to do even if you don't do it perfectly! Enjoy yourself!
- Journey to joyful events and activities.
- Occasionally indulge yourself with something you've always wanted yet never purchased or received.

**Learn to balance 'yes' and 'no';** know your limits. Prioritize what you do.

- Learn to say 'yes' when appropriate and 'no' when the activity will overburden you or simply do not want to volunteer your time to do it.

**Become bold; ask for assistance.** It's okay to need help doing things.

- Do you remember how great it felt when you helped someone else? To know you've made a difference in someone's life is a heartfelt joy.

**Spiritual activities.** Develop the habit of reading scripture, devotions or attending Bible studies. Continue to mature in your relationship with Christ. Contribute to intergenerational activities to help the younger persons mature in their faith journey. Love those around you and surround yourself with positive people.

For those who have been around awhile remember that depression is not a normal part of aging. When mental health problems are suspected, have them evaluated!

Champs  
Center for Healthy Aging, Ministries, Programs & Services  
13271 Millard Avenue  
Omaha, Nebraska 68137  
Tel: (402) 895-2224  
Website: [www.champsonline.info](http://www.champsonline.info)  
Email: [champs@crossandheart.org](mailto:champs@crossandheart.org)

Champs is funded by a grant from  
the Alegent Health Community Benefit Trust