

*Living Well After
Brain Cancer Treatment
Education Series*

Boost Your Brain Power



Many people find it difficult to focus and think clearly during and after treatment. Here are some general wellness strategies that survivors have found helpful to support brain health.

Physical activity

Exercise is a good way to stay physically fit and is helpful for your brain health and mood. Physical activity can improve thinking speed, memory, learning and executive functioning skills. It also helps to support healthy brain function and reduce stress. Just 20 minutes of low to moderate intensity exercise a couple of times a week can make a big difference. Walking, yoga, gardening, bike riding, swimming and other activities are examples of physical activity.

Mental activity and novelty

Exercising the mind also helps to protect and improve cognitive function. Try to engage in activities that are intellectually stimulating and that challenge you to learn something new or unfamiliar. Arts and crafts, writing, playing games, reading, cooking, and social events can all be areas that use your mind in new and interesting ways.

Do things you love

With the burden of treatment, it can be difficult to remember to enjoy passions and hobbies. Keeping busy with things you love to do can reduce stress and keep your mind sharp. Whether it be taking a walk to enjoy nature, calling a friend, or pursuing a new passion or hobby, remember to do things that truly bring you joy and happiness.

Meaningful connection

Spending time with others, engaging in stimulating conversation, and staying in touch with family and friends are good for your brain health. Try a type of connection that works for you. Supporting others can help foster a sense of purpose. Spending time in nature has shown to improve cognitive function, mood, and overall well-being. Walking, visiting meditation gardens, and engaging in outdoor activities are just a few ways to stay connected to nature.

Your brain is an oxygen-rich organ and therefore dependent upon a well-functioning circulatory and respiratory system. Therefore, activities that improve your overall physical wellness will also have benefits to your brain.



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Positivity and relaxation

While we all experience challenging thoughts and feelings, keeping stress in check and maintaining a positive outlook can boost your brain health and mood. Meditating, deep breathing, playing uplifting music, watching an inspiring movie, and setting realistic expectations for yourself are a few examples of ways to help your mind wind down and stay positive.

Nutrition

Lifestyle factors, such as poor diet and excessive alcohol consumption can have a negative influence on a person's cognition. Eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats (such as olive oil, nuts, and fish) has been shown to protect and improve cognitive function and keep the immune system healthy. If you or your loved ones are concerned about your alcohol consumption, please talk to your doctor to get information and determine the best next steps.

Sleep and rest

Getting plenty of sleep is very important for learning and memory. The average adult requires seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Skimping on a few hours of sleep or oversleeping can be problematic for your emotional and cognitive health. Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends, will help you fall asleep and wake up more easily. Napping is a good way to make up for lost sleep, however, napping for too long and/or too late in the day can make it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep at night. Keep naps short, to just 10 to 20 minutes, and before 4 pm to help avoid these problems. If you or your partner notice you are loudly snoring when you sleep, then make sure to discuss this with your doctor. Please see the sheet on *Managing Sleep* for more information.

Routine and structure

People often feel more 'brain fog' when they don't have a good daily routine. Sticking to a daily schedule can also add purpose and focus to your day, as well as reduce the demands placed on your memory. Consider using a planner and alarms to keep you on track with your routine. Also try creating a to-do list and mark off items as you go along to track your progress.

Manage sensory and information overload

Too many distractions can overstimulate the brain and make it harder to stay focused and think clearly. To help stay focused for longer periods of time, try reducing background noises (for example, turning off nearby TV or radio), holding conversations in a quiet area, asking people to speak one at a time, and taking periodic breaks during the day to relax. See the *Attention and Concentration* sheet in this series for more information.