

It's Time To Brain-er-cise

Want a healthy body and mind? Here are some tricks that will making getting started easy

December 06, 2007 | By Leonor Vivanco RedEye

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Can't remember where you put your keys? Tired of applying eye cream to erase wrinkles? If you curse and yell out, "I must be getting old," but your license shows you're 30, there are ways to help you boost your brain power and defy aging without going under the knife or breaking the bank.

As the holidays mark the unofficial start of eating -- and stressing -- season, you might not be taking care of your body as well as you should. Plus, when it's cold outside, you'd probably rather hibernate in front of the TV instead of hit the gym.

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Here's the good news: Getting mentally and physically fit doesn't have to take a lot of time or effort. It's as easy as what you eat and what you do with your mind and body.

Nutritionists, aging experts and life coaches say incorporating simple, healthy habits -- such as eating vegetables, exercising and playing mind games -- helps you stay young, and live a happy and long life.

You are what you eat

Dawn Jackson Blatner, 32, a registered dietitian and a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, said you can boost your brain power by eating certain foods.

"Part of being youthful is to have your mind sharp. The foods you eat can absolutely impact how sharp you are upstairs," she said.

Many of these foods also do a body good.

Vegetables: Meals should be 50 percent produce, Blatner said. Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage are recommended to help keep your memory sharp, she said. "It should help with both short-term [memory], like where you parked your car at the mall when you were holiday shopping, as well as long-term memory, like if you could remember somebody's face or name you met a couple years ago."

Fish: It's good to have two fish meals a week -- especially salmon and tuna - because of the omega-3 fatty acids. "When we age and when we're busy, we have trouble focusing," Blatner said. "Omega 3 fatty acids can help us focus." In general, the benefits of fish exceed the dangers of mercury, she said. It's a good idea to get a variety of fish and to avoid large fish such as shark and swordfish, because the larger the fish and the longer it lives, the more mercury it can accumulate, she said.

Fruits: The brighter and more colorful the fruit, the better because it has more antioxidants, said Dr. Michael Roizen, co-author of the book "YOU: Staying Young." Red grapes and cranberries are good for you, and Roizen said avocados are best because they have omega-3 fatty acids. A recommended dose of two grams a day of omega-3 fatty acids, which can include an ounce of walnuts, helps keep your nerves functioning and protects against inflammation of the joints too. "It helps your skin look younger and helps your hair to have a glow to it," said Roizen, co-founder of RealAge, a consumer health media company.

Coffee/tea: Having two to three cups of coffee a day can decrease your risk of diabetes by 30 percent, Blatner said. "Coffee has been shown to improve mental performance especially under stressful situations," she said. A little bit of cream and sugar won't hurt, but watch out for calories and use portion control. "If you continuously drink coffee throughout the day, it'll lead to things like insomnia, anxiety and irritability and racing hearts," she said. Green tea has two-thirds of the caffeine coffee does, she said. "It's a nice way to get that memory enhancement without getting the jitters," Blatner said.

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To stay young, you need to take care of body, mind and spirit, and when all three are in balance, you tend to be a happier person, said life coach Niquenya Fulbright, 30, who lives in Edgewater. She sees about 50 clients a year and estimates that 30 percent to 40 percent are looking for ways to stay young.

"You look younger and feel younger when you're smiling and happy," she said.

Feel young, energetic and rejuvenated by doing these things:

Flossing: "The bacteria that causes periodontal disease sets up an immune reaction that makes your arteries older," Roizen said. Aged arteries can lead to heart disease, stroke, memory loss, wrinkles, impotency and a decrease in the quality of orgasms, he said.

Yoga: Stretching can help keep your body in good shape and slow down your heart rate, said Suddha Weixler, director of the Chicago Yoga Center in Lakeview. "If someone willfully and skillfully slows down their breathing and becomes more centered, it's beneficial for the organs," he said. Having shortness of breath and being angry can kill your blood cells and deplete your energy, he said.

Meditation: Doing it on a regular basis, Weixler said, can help you clear your mind, concentrate and think better. "You become basically more in charge of what's happening around you," he said.

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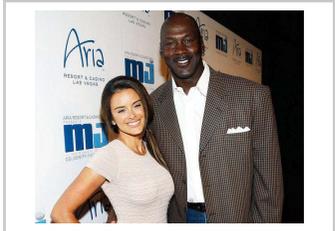
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