

It's Time to Exercise.....Your Brain!

Thousands, no maybe millions, of people greet the New Year with a resolution to exercise. But they concentrate on their bodies from the neck down and never consider exercising one of the most important parts of our bodies....the BRAIN. We've known for many years that regular exercise and a healthy, balanced diet helps us to maintain our physical health which we all consider to be an important element to healthy aging. Maintaining our BRAIN health is just as important as our overall health but we need to work at it just as we need to work at keeping our hearts, lungs, bones and muscles healthy through physical exercises.

Neurobics is the name of the new science of brain exercise. Its primary goal is to help us keep our mental abilities... our memory as well as learning new information. Neurobics is different from the brain exercises you did in the past which were usually logic based puzzles such as crossword puzzles and Sudoku. This type of exercise basically involved doing what you already know, but just doing more of it. It is not that they are of no value but their value is limited because they usually only involve a small amount of your brain and you are also just using the same brain neurons (the name for brain cells).

A physical exercise program needs to involve all muscle groups and a mental exercise program needs to involve multiple brain areas in new ways in order to increase brain connections and develop new brain pathways. Neurobics will contribute to making your brain more responsive and flexible so it can take on mental challenges whether they be maintaining memories, learning new tasks and information or being creative with your thinking and doing. Very simply, neurobics is based on how our brain works not just on working the brain!

Recently two major myths about our aging brains have been disproved by neuroscientists.

Myth 1: Our brains go into a steep decline just because we are aging.

Fact: In 1998 Dr. Fred Gage of the Salk Institute and researchers in Sweden discovered new cell growth in patients well over the age of 55.

Myth 2: Mental decline is due to the steady death of nerve cells.

Fact: In the past 10 years scientists have determined that brain cells in older people can grow new connections between areas of the brain.

These research results and similar others are the foundation for the development of neurobics.

Although there is nothing magic about neurobics, it does require you to do two things you may not be doing on a regular basis...experiencing the unexpected or novel or something new AND involving all of your five senses on a daily basis. Our five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste,

touch) are the only way your brain has contact with what is going on in your life and in the world around you.

Anything you learn must enter your brain via one or more of your senses so you need to learn how to involve all five and not just use the two dominant ones which are vision and hearing. In fact, multiple research studies have proven that using multiple senses at the same time is actually the best learning process and it improves both comprehension and retention of learning. And your “sixth sense” – emotion - enters into how likely you are to remember something also. Therefore interactions with people are an important factor and it is equally important that we create opportunities to socialize, continue our learning, and be involved with our world.

Recent articles published in the New England Journal of Medicine and the Journal of the American Medical Association have concluded that participation in new cognitive (thinking) activities significantly lowered the risk of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. In a nutshell, an active brain is a healthy brain and an active brain leads to brain fitness.

Would you like to learn the basics of neurobics? Would you like to be introduced to how to use neurobics in your daily life? Would you like to actually do some neurobic exercises? Once a month (usually every third Tuesday) the Delta College *50+...Just Like Gold Program* has a “Bits and Bites” program (a bite to eat first then a bit of information about a subject that is of particular interest to those of us 50+ in age). The Tuesday, January 19, 2010 meeting will be about neurobics. You are invited to join us but please call in advance as reservations are necessary and there is a small charge for lunch. If you become a member of the Delta College *50+ ...Just Like Gold Program* you will pay reduced fees for the monthly meetings as well as all other programs.

“Use it or Lose it” may be a trite phrase but it is certainly true when it comes to the health of our brains. Brain fitness is up to YOU!

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