

# Brain Fitness

“The more you use your brain, the more brain you will have to use.” (George A. Dorsey) Research now tells us that we must not let our brain just do the same things over and over, we must use it to experience new learning if we want to maintain brain fitness. Learning is the number one brain builder. Having an inflexible routine is the number one brain drainer.

From the day we are born the brain is primed for learning, ready to capture the experiences of our lives and encode them into its web of nerve connections. According to recent brain research, actively engaging our brain in learning throughout life can have a significant impact on how well we age. Brain researchers are also quick to make the point that learning and memory are not the same thing, though they are intricately linked.

Learning is how you acquire new information and memory is how you store that information over time. There is no memory without learning, but there is learning without memory because you can learn things and forget them either almost immediately or over time. As a result, not all learning gets stored into memories that last and often we do not want to remember something for an extended time (for example, we look up a phone number and want to retain it just long enough to call it).

There is a prevalent belief that older people can't learn new things, but brain research has found no evidence to support this myth in healthy older people. It also is not true that everyone will lose his or her memory as they age. In fact, research suggests that the more active you keep your brain as you age; the more mentally agile you will remain. It may take some older people longer to learn something new, but they retain what they have learned as well as younger people. Brain researchers have learned more about the workings of the brain in the past ten years than they had in the previous century.

One of the earliest indications of brain aging in healthy adults is a change in memory. However, this actually begins to happen in our early adult life as neurologists report that memory peaks in our late twenties. Almost every one of us wonders if Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia might be looming so we want to know if our memory failures/lapses are within a normal range. Most memory changes you experience are perfectly normal. Below is a checklist (Memory Research Dept. of University of Wisconsin) that shows the range of memory loss from benign to severe.

## **Early, usually benign signs of memory loss**

- Occasionally having trouble finding the right word
- Momentarily “blinking” on the name of a familiar person
- Temporarily misplacing an object or forgetting what day of the week it is
- Forgetting an occasional meeting or appointment
- Getting disoriented in a large store or large parking lot
- Not recognizing someone you met a long time ago

## **Signs of serious memory loss**

- Difficulty naming common objects
- Asking the same questions over and over
- Putting common objects in wrong places (an iron in the refrigerator & not recalling how it got there)

- Wearing clothes inappropriately (multiple layers of clothes, clothes for the wrong temperature)
- Getting lost on one's own street
- Not knowing where you are or how you got there
- Inability to perform common household tasks or chores

Scientists and medical professionals agree it is easier to preserve and enhance memory and mental agility than to try to regain it. The brain can't exercise itself – it needs you to do it!

**Neurobics** is the name of the new science of brain exercise. Its primary goal is to help us keep our mental abilities. Neurobics is different from typical brain exercises which are usually logic based puzzles such as crossword puzzles and Sudoku. This type of exercise basically involves what you already know but just doing more of it. It is not that doing this is of no value but the value is limited because you are just using the same brain neurons (the name for brain cells) and not building new neural pathways.

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 and information, learning new tasks and information or being creative in your thinking and doing. Very simply, neurobics is based on how our brain works not just on working the brain.

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? You are invited to attend an all day fun, informative and very interactive "Brain Booster Camp" either Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup> or Thursday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Delta College main campus. Advance registration is required by calling (989) 686-9444. Make brain fitness a part of your anti aging strategy!

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