

## **Can you remember to remember.... It takes a Healthy Brain (& Nervous System)**

**By James Bone**

Over the Easter break I was doing some brain puzzles with my family, and it made think about how we can keep our brains healthy and fit to do all the things we want. Our brain and nervous system are very important. They control and integrate every part of your body and give you your consciousness and your ability to think, remember, learn and achieve great things.

### ***Can you remember?***

You may have noticed yourself that your memory, concentration, and thinking can vary in quality – better some times than others. What causes this change? We often associate getting older with reduced mental function. Is this inevitable? There is also a massive increase in people with Alzheimer's Dementia – a progressive, life destroying disease, which destroys your brain cells, leading to memory, thinking, and behaviour loss. Can Alzheimer's be prevented?

The GOOD news is that research has shown that there are things you can do for yourself, to help protect your BRAIN, and the more you do of these things the better the result.

### ***Watch your Stress Load***

Chronic Stress has been shown to damage your brain cells and memory. One of the major culprits seems to be chronic levels of the hormone, Cortisol. Stress load can be reduced by healthy lifestyle practices described below, and practising YOGA has been proven to be a great way to bring balance to your Cortisol levels.

Stress can also create imbalance in your autonomic nervous system, where the activating part called the Sympathetic Nervous System is working too much, and the restorative part called the Parasympathetic Nervous System is underactive. This imbalance to the nervous system can cause great disturbances to your mind and body health, including increasing the risk of heart problems. Relaxation and Yoga Breathing (pranayama) can be great ways to restore Autonomic balance.

### ***Use it or lose it***

Research by Neuroscientists at the University of Queensland have found that nerve cells can die, if they do not receive electrical or chemical stimulation from other nerve cells. This perhaps strengthens the idea that our brains need to be used to keep them healthy.

Stay Mentally Active – learn something new, travel, solve puzzles and games, don't be afraid to think (I know it takes effort, but it is worth it!!!)

### ***What's Good for the Heart is Good for the Brain***

Research has shown that blood circulation, hypertension, obesity etc can all increase the risk of getting dementia, and if you have dementia, can make the symptoms much worse. It make sense – brain cells need lots of oxygen and glucose to function – in fact 20% of that pumped from the heart. So adopt principles of good heart health – no smoking, Heart healthy diet, and manage your weight, blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol.

### ***Remain Socially Active***

Research has also shown that remaining socially engaged, along with being mentally and physically active can greatly reduce dementia risk. So get involved in social groups, sports groups, clubs, group classes. volunteer groups, family, and friends. Stay connected and get support as needed.

### ***Stay Physically Active***

This is my special favourite – being physically active is so good for so many things, and besides it just helps to make you “feel good” – reducing anxiety and depression.

You don't even need to do strenuous activity to get benefits – 30 minutes of moderate activity, such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming, dancing, etc, 5 or more days per week. How easy is that!

Also remember how yoga can help enhance circulation and reduce stress.

### ***Meditation***

I have included Meditation because there is a lot of growing research to show how Meditation can improve mental function, such as focus, concentration and brain cell integration, besides being another great tool to reduce stress load. Meditation can be in the form of Mindfulness (or open awareness of whole experience) or Concentrative (or focusing on one thing such as a mantra). Try this beautiful process of sitting upright, becoming still, and giving awareness to the NOW for 10 minutes or more every day.

There are of course a number other specific things you can do for yourself, such as supplements – but these are best done in conjunction with a Health or Medical advisor.

### **Resources**

[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) - Alzheimer's and Brain Health Website

[www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com) - a good resource for neuroscience info in a user friendly format.

[www.anythingbutwork.com/health/heart-brain](http://www.anythingbutwork.com/health/heart-brain) - heart brain connection article