

Learn more easily

Brain, Strain, Rhythm and Blues

The brain likes to be used, and luckily, learning promotes brain health. Our brain is plastic, meaning that it responds and changes to the environment. The brain changes, depending upon what we do, not do, stress, pain, and our feelings.

The brain also seems to need proper rhythms to function properly. Breathing practices and meditation have been shown to improve brain rhythms, the coordinated electrical flow called gamma waves.

Exercise and physical activity have also been shown to aid brain function.

Mindfulness, the process of being aware and attentive in the present moment has also been shown to improve brain function, mood, and memory. Yoga itself is a process of mindfulness and research has shown its practice has translated into more mindful activities, such as eating.

Sleep, Rest, Pause and Reflect

Sleep is important to learning and memory consolidation. However, our memories are strengthened during periods of rest while we are awake, researchers at New York University have found. Additionally stillness, relaxation and reflection time after learning have also been shown to aid the process of improving memory formation. Much like the yoga process of pausing after activity. “How pleasant it is to do nothing, then rest afterwards

Good Stress, Bad Stress

Research has also shown that chronic stress damages memory, but a short bout of stress prior to learning may actually aid memory. A short bout of stress may include some vigorous exercise, a challenging balance, a difficult yoga practice, etc.

Go Slow vs Quick Fix

Learning also appears to occur better when given in short bouts over time, than when all together. Classical yoga promotes the importance of time to integrate and understand concepts properly. This goes against the modern learning principle of quick mass learning over a weekend.

Pay Attention

Even our attention can greatly influence learning. A researcher at Queensland University found that specific attention to a dysfunctional muscle during exercise was much better at restoring function, than during general exercise, even though both exercises activated the same muscles. Attention appears to specifically reactivate brain pathways

involved in the movement. The Yoga process itself is one of attention and awareness. Attention is often targeted in yoga by a theme or intention of a specific yoga practice. The same yoga moves practised with a different attention and intention, produce a different outcome and effect.

Extend Yourself

Knowledge learnt needs to be used: solve problems in new ways, teaching to others, or practising with challenge and difficulty. Learning languages, sport, and travel are often considered challenging. We need to challenge ourselves by stepping outside of our comfort zones.

“The road to improvement isn’t necessarily about getting more and more information, but transforming our understanding of the information we already have. This requires us to look inside at what we already know and to use that knowledge in a more effective manner. The educational tools and resources are already inside of us.” *Sahar*

Tips

- Learn something new every day
- Challenge yourself – step out of your comfort zone
- Stay active
- A little stress before learning is helpful – constant stress is bad
- Pause, rest, reflect and relax after learning something new
- Approach learning in a mindful way and give attention to what you are learning
- Practise Practise Practise

References:

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 - Short stressful events may improve working memory - www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/07/090723113657.htm
 - One way of learning is better than another - www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/10/091001163730.htm
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