

70 Ways to Better Brainpower -

(In no particular order.)

1. Breath deep. More air in means more oxygen in the blood and therefore in the brain. Breathe through your nose and you'll notice that you use your diaphragm more, drawing air deeper into your lungs. Several deep breaths can also help to relax you, which is conducive to clearer thinking.

2. Meditate. A simple meditation you can do right now is just closing your eyes and paying attention to your breath. Tensing up your muscles and then relaxing them to start may help. When your mind wanders, just bring your attention back to your breath. Five or ten minutes of this will usually relax you, clear your mind, and leave you more ready for any mental task.

3. Sit up straight. Posture affects your thinking process. Prove it to yourself by doing math in your head while slouching, looking at the floor and letting your mouth hang open. Then do the mental math while sitting up straight, keeping your mouth closed and looking forward or slightly upwards. You'll notice that it's easier to think with the latter posture.

4. Phosphatidyl Serine (PS). This supplement has been shown in clinical studies to increase lucidity and rate of learning. It activates cell-to-cell communication, helps regulate cell growth, improves the functioning of the special receptors found on cells, and prepares cells for activity. In other words, it can help your brain power. It's also thought to reverse memory decline. Phosphatidylserine has no known adverse side effects.

5. Vinpocetine. This extract, derived from an alkaloid found in the Periwinkle plant, is used as a cerebral vasodilator. It increases blood flow to the brain, which improves its oxygenation and thereby increases mental alertness and acuity. Research suggests it may also be the most powerful memory enhancer available to date.

6. Ginkgo Biloba. The leaves of this tree have been proven to increase blood flow to the brain. The trees are often planted in parks. My friends and I used to eat a few leaves when we wanted a brain boost. It is also inexpensive, if you buy the capsules or tea at any health food store.

7. Saint John's Wort. This is a common weed that may be growing in your yard. Although its brain enhancing qualities are less documented (studies do show its usefulness for treating long-term depression), many people swear by its temporary mood-elevating effect, and our brains tend to function better when we are happy. It is inexpensive, but I used to just collect it in the yard and make tea of it. (Hypercom Perforatum, if you want to look it up by its botanical name.)

8. Good thinking habits. Just use a problem solving technique for several weeks and it will become a habit. Redesign everything you see for a while, and that will become a habit. You can develop many good thinking habits with some effort, and then be more resourceful effortlessly from that point on. Use the power of habit.

9. Use dead time. This is time that is otherwise wasted or just under-utilized. Driving time, time spent in waiting rooms, or even time spent raking your yard can be included in this. With a tape player and a trip to a public library, you can start to use this time to listen to books-on-tape. You may spend 200 hours a year in your car. What could you learn in that time?

10. Learn a language. Learning a new language has been shown to halt the age-

related decline in brain function. It also introduces your mind to new concepts and new ways of looking at things (in English we are afraid, whereas in Spanish we have fear). It is one of the best brain exercises.

11. Rosemary. This common herb may have an effect on the brain when the scent is inhaled. We are waiting for the research, but some people swear that just sniffing rosemary wakes up their brain. It seems safe, so if you have rosemary in your spice rack, give it a try.

12. Mindfulness exercises. Concentration and clear thinking are more or less automatic once you remove distractions. Learn to stop and watch your busy mind. As you notice things that are subtly bothering you, deal with them. This might mean making a phone call you need to make, or putting things on a list so you can forget them for now. With practice, this becomes easier, and your thinking becomes more powerful.

13. Write. Writing is good for your mind in a number of ways. It is a way to tell your memory what is important, so you'll recall things more easily in the future. It is a way to clarify your thinking. It is a way to exercise your creativity and analytical ability. Diaries, idea-journals, poetry, note-taking and story-writing are all ways to use writing to boost your brain power.

14. Listen to Mozart. In a study at the University of California, researchers found that children who studied piano and sang daily in chorus, were much better at solving puzzles, and when tested, scored 80% higher in spatial intelligence than the non-musical group. In another study, 36 students were given three spatial reasoning tests on a standard IQ test. Just before the first test, they listened to Mozart's sonata for Two Pianos in D Major, K. 448 for ten minutes. Before the second test, they listened to a relaxation tape. Before the third, they sat in silence. The average scores for all 36 students: 1st test: 119. 2nd test: 111. 3rd test: 110. A nine-point boost from Mozart!

15. Develop your intuition. Intuition can be an important part of brainpower. Einstein and others have relied heavily on their intuitive hunches

16. Avoid foods that cause subtle allergies. These can include wheat, corn, peanuts and dairy products. Watch yourself to see if you have a problem with any of these. They cause digestive problems and brain fog in some people.

17. Sleep better. As long as you get a certain amount of sleep - probably a minimum of five hours - the quality seems to be more important than the quantity. Also, short naps in the afternoon seem to work well to recharge the brain for some people.

18. Caffeine. The research shows higher test scores for students who drink coffee before major exams. My chess game gets better. In other studies, it has been shown that too much caffeine leads to poorer quality decisions. Caffeine affects individuals differently, and has some nasty long-term side effects for some of us, but short-term - it works!

19. Avoid sugar. Any simple carbohydrates can give you "brain fog." Sometimes called the "sugar blues" as well, this sluggish feeling makes it hard to think clearly. It results from the insulin rushing into the bloodstream to counteract the sugar rush. Avoid pasta, sugars, white bread and potato chips before any important mental tasks.

20. Hypnosis audios. The power of suggestion is real, and one way to use it is with hypnosis tapes, CD's or downloads. This type of brain "programming" has more evidence for it than subliminals.

21. Speed reading. Contrary to what many believe, your comprehension of material often goes up when you learn to speed-read. You get to learn a lot more in less time, and it is definitely a good brain exercise.

22. Exercise. Long term exercise can boost brainpower, which isn't surprising. Anything that affects physical health in a positive way probably helps the brain too. Recent research, though, shows that cognitive function is improved immediately after just ten minutes of aerobic exercise. If you need a brain recharge, you might want to walk up and down the stairs a few times.

23. Imaginary friends. Talking to and getting advice from characters in your mind can be a great way to access the information in your subconscious mind. Imagine a conversation with a person who has a lot of knowledge in the area you want advice in.

24. Develop your creativity. Creativity gives power to your thinking. Raw computation can be done by computers now, but humans provide the creative thought that shapes our world.

25. Learn more efficiently. When you decide to learn something, take notes from the start. Leave each "learning session" with a question or two in mind, to create anticipation and curiosity. Take short breaks, so there will be more beginnings and endings to your studies (Things learned at the beginning or ending of a class or session are remembered better).

26. Use techniques for clear thinking. Cluttered rooms and offices can contribute to cluttered thinking. Organize a space for mental work. Sigh, stretch, and take a deep breath before you start on a tough mental job. Plan some distraction-free time for brainstorming.

27. Brain wave entrainment. The newest brain wave entrainment products are powerful tools for altering your brain function. Some will almost immediately relax you, while others will put your brain waves in a pattern that is most conducive to analytical thinking.

28. Creatine. This is a compound found in meat, used by athletes to help build muscle. Now the evidence is here to show that it helps your brain as well. Proceedings B , a journal published by the Royal Society reports that the research showed improvement in working memory and general intelligence resulting from creatine supplementation. The dose used in the study was 5 grams per day. This is about the level used to boost sports performance, and is as much as you'd normally get in four pounds of meat, according to lead researcher Dr. Caroline Rae.

29. Talk. Talking is only good for the brain if you are actually exercising it, of course. Try explaining something that you don't understand very well to a friend, though, and you'll notice that the process of explaining will help you clarify your understanding.

30. Do something you enjoy. This is a way to both lower stress and rev up your brain. The key is to do something active. Watching TV doesn't count. Whether it is playing Scrabble or building birdhouses, when you are actively engaged in an activity that you enjoy, you worry less about things and you start to think better.

31. Adjust your beliefs. Believe you are smarter, and you'll become smarter. For this, affirmations may work, but even better is evidence. Make a note of your successes. Tell yourself, "Hey, that was really creative," when you do something creative. When you

have a good idea, make a note of it. Gather the evidence for your own intelligence and you'll start to experience more of it.

32. Brain exercises. Do math in your mind while driving. Think of a new use for everything you see. Regular use of the brain has been shown to generate new neuronal growth, and even halt the decline of mental function that often comes with age.

33. Learn new things. This is another way to exercise the brain. It can also be done with little time investment if you use books-on-tapes while driving.

34. Walk. Exercise has been shown to benefit the brain, and walking is one of the best exercises for many. It is low impact, and the rhythmic nature of it seems to put you in a state that is very conducive to clear thinking. In fact, carry a tape recorder with you to take notes, and a twenty minute walk can be a great way to solve problems.

35. Model others. Find others that are creative, intelligent, or very productive. Do what they do, and think what they think. This is a key principle of neuro-linguistic programming. Be careful about taking their advice, though. Successful people often don't really understand why they are successful. Do what they do, not what they say.

36. Eat fish. Eating fish actually speeds up brain waves, and improves concentration. Researchers have also found an almost perfect correlation between intake of fish and lowered levels of depression in the various countries of the world. The U.S. has 24 times the incidence of depression as Japan, for example, where fish intake is much higher.

37. Avoid unnecessary arguments. When you defend a position too vigorously, especially when it is just to "win" the argument, you invest our ego into it. This is not conducive to the easy acceptance and use of new information. In other words, you put your mind in a rut, and you dig it deeper with each argument. Debate can be a valuable thing, but when the ego takes over, the mind closes a little. This is not a recipe for better thinking.

38. Laugh. The release of endorphins caused by laughter lowers stress levels, which is good for long term brain health. Laughter also tends to leave you more open to new ideas and thoughts.

39. Play. Stimulating the brain causes measurable changes in the structure of the brain. New connections are made and new brain cells are grown. Intellectual play, as well as any playing that involves hand-eye coordination stimulates the brain.

40. Do puzzles. Crossword puzzles, lateral thinking puzzles, and even good riddles are a great way to get brain exercise. You can work on them while waiting for a dentist appointment, or on the bus, if you are short on time.

41. Sing. When you are alone in your car, try singing about something you are working on. This taps into and exercises your right brain. Have you ever noticed how it is easier to rhyme when you sing than when you just speak or write? This is because the right brain is better at pattern recognition. By doing this brain exercise regularly you can train yourself to tap into the power of the right brain. This will make you a more effective problem-solver. If you doubt the distinction between the hemispheres of the brain, look

at how stutterers can stop stuttering as soon as they start singing. Try it.

42. Nuts. University students in Brazil and other South American countries often eat several Brazil nuts before an exam, believing they are good for their mental power. The evidence is starting to confirm this. Other nuts that have minerals and amino acids that are beneficial to the brain include almonds and walnuts.

43. Olive oil. High in mono-unsaturated fat, olive oil has been shown to improve memory. A cheaper alternative is canola oil, but this hasn't been studied much yet.

44. Vitamin supplements. In studies, children scored higher on tests when on a regimen of daily vitamin supplements. "Experts" will tell you that if you eat a balanced diet, you don't need supplements, which, given the culture here, is really just a sales pitch for vitamins, isn't it? Who eats a perfectly balanced diet?

45. Fiber. It isn't just what goes in, but what comes out that is important to brain function. Toxic build-up in the body and brain can cause "brain fog." People often report clearer thinking as one of the benefits of curing their constipation.

46. Self awareness. This may not seem important to brain power, but it is. When you know yourself better, you can avoid the usual effects of ego and emotion in your seemingly "rational" thinking. Or you can at least take it into account. Watch yourself, especially as you explain things or argue.

47. Motivate yourself. Motivation is as important to mental tasks as it is to any other. Learn a few simple techniques for self motivation.

48. Avoid too much stress. Neuropsychiatrist Richard Restak, M.D., from the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Services, sums up the research thus: "Stress causes brain damage." Long term stress has repeatedly been shown to hurt the brain, not to mention the rest of the body. Learn a few stress reduction techniques if you get stressed out often.

49. Get educated. Scientists have known for a while that the less educated get Alzheimer's more frequently. Education in any area seems to make the brain stronger.

50. Avoid too much fat. In laboratory studies, animals consistently learn slower when they are on a diet high in fat. Type of fat may make a difference, so you may want to stick to using olive oil and other non-saturated fats. Saturated fats have been shown to actually stunt the growth of brain cells.

51. Eat less. Overeating has the immediate effect of redirecting more blood to the digestive process, leaving less for the brain. Long term, it can cause arterial obstructions that reduce blood flow to the brain permanently. In at least one study, rats on a restricted-calorie diet had more brainpower.

52. Avoid suspect foods. There is evidence that the following foods can be bad for your brain: Artificial food colorings, artificial sweeteners, colas, corn syrup, frostings, high-sugar drinks, hydrogenated fats, sugars, white bread, and any white-flour products.

53. Eat breakfast. When kids who didn't eat breakfast started to eat it, researchers found that their math scores went up a whole grade on average.

54. Avoid diabetes. The development of diabetes coincides with a dropping of IQ scores. In other words, if you want to maintain your brain power, follow your doctors dietary recommendations for preventing or treating diabetes.

55. Eat foods high in antioxidants. Antioxidants protect all your cells, including brain cells. Some of the foods highest in antioxidants include: prunes, raisins, blueberries, blackberries, garlic, kale, cranberries, strawberries, spinach, and raspberries. In one test, rats had age-related mental decline reversed by eating the equivalent of a 1/2 cup of blueberries per day.

56. Drink wine. In moderation, red wine can be good for the brain, it seems. It is rich in antioxidants, which protect brain cells. One glass per day for women and two for men is usually considered a safe and moderate amount.

57. Use alcohol in moderation. In a study at the University of Indiana School of Medicine, elderly light drinkers (fewer than 4 drinks per week) scored higher on tests of thinking abilities than non-drinkers. Those who drank 10 or more drinks per week scored lower. It is known that alcohol can kill brain cells, so moderation seems to be the key.

58. Folic acid. According to one study, 200 micrograms of folic acid, the amount found in 3/4 cup of cooked spinach, alleviates depression and reverses memory loss.

59. Potential brain foods. Other foods that may be good for your brain include: Avocados, bananas, lean beef, brewer's yeast, broccoli, brown rice, brussel sprouts, cantaloupe, cheese, chicken, collard greens, eggs, flaxseed oil, legumes, oatmeal, oranges, peanut butter, peas, potatoes, romaine lettuce, salmon, soybeans, spinach, tuna, turkey, wheat germ, and yogurt.

60. Vitamin E. Jean Carper, in researching her book, "Your Miracle Brain," found that many brain researchers are taking 400 I.U.s of vitamin E daily. It is an antioxidant, and reduces the clogging of blood vessels, including those going in the brain.

61. Vitamin C. Taken in the form of orange juice in a study at the Texas Women's University, vitamin C increased the IQ scores of children.

62. Selenium. 100 micrograms of selenium has been shown to be a mood-elevator. Your brain almost certainly functions better when you are in a better mood. Foods rich in selenium include Brazil nuts and garlic.

63. Alpha-lipoic acid. Alpha-lipoic acid (10 to 50 milligrams daily) improves memory and protects nerve cells.

64. Inositol. This is a safe and natural substance that is often grouped with the B-vitamins. It reduces stress and promotes clear thinking. It contributes to energy production, and so can "wake you up." Animal studies show a measurable increase in physical activity for up to five hours after taking it.

65. Huperzine A. This is a compound extracted from the Chinese club moss. Researchers both in Israel and the U.S. have used it to treat Alzheimer's. It improves memory and learning and seems to be very safe.

66. Ask questions. This is a great way to keep your brain in shape. Just get in the habit of asking questions often, even if it is only in your own mind. Why are taller buildings better? What is the purpose of curbs? Ask anything that comes to mind, and ponder the possible answers.

67. Sniff basil. This is another of the herbs that may be good for your brain. No studies yet, but many report a brain boost from smelling basil.

68. Temperature. Many people have noted that they think better at certain temperatures. In general, it seems that being slightly cool, but not uncomfortable, is most conducive to good thinking. Try experimenting on yourself to see what temperature works best for you.

69. Use systems. From the time I was ten years old, 12×49 was always $(12 \times 50) - 12$. It's easier to figure in your head this way (588, by the way). I didn't get any credit for my personal algorithms then, but they are selling these shortcuts on late-night TV now, because they work. You can find your own easier ways to do mental math or other mental tasks, or read a good book on them.

70. Make a brainpower plan. It takes about twenty to thirty days of repetition to establish new habits, many psychologists will tell you. This means that when you create your plan for better brainpower, be sure you plan to use that new problem solving technique, or eat those new brain foods for at least three weeks. You can use many of the brain boosters here and get immediate results, but it is creating new habits that will give you the most brainpower.