



TBH Focus

Mind | *Stretch Your Mind*

- Staying intellectually engaged and keeping your mind active is one of the most effective ways to guard against dementia.
- Challenging the brain—to learn new things, to be creative, to think “outside of the box”—has been linked to the growth of new neurons (brain cells) and synapses (the pathways between brain cells).
- The emergence of fresh brain cells and synapses may create a “cognitive reserve” that helps protect the brain from memory loss.

The TBH Science

You don't have to channel Charles Schultz to draw on the brain-boosting benefits of cartooning. By trying your hand at a new skill, you stretch your mind to think in new ways—and such intellectual engagement has been found to reduce the risk of dementia. What's more, many researchers believe that intellectual engagement helps to build “cognitive reserve,” which theoretically provides a bit of a cushion if memory loss should strike. Cartooning does this in several ways: by prodding memory cells for images to recreate, honing fine-motor skills, and challenging you to arrange disparate figures to form a recognizable image. And so what if your Snoopy looks more like a four-legged bagel than a beagle? Even nonsensical drawing can yield brain gains: In one study, folks who doodled during a phone call were better able to remember what they heard during the call and did better on a surprise memory test.

You Will Need

- “Ready, Set, Cartoon!” worksheets (see Resources)
- Examples of different types of cartoons (see Resources)
- A white board and markers or a flip chart and markers
- Paper and pencils/crayons/markers for each participant



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and TBH Science to talk about the brain-health benefits of stretching your mind through activities like drawing.
 - Show examples of different cartoon types, including comic strips from the newspaper, political cartoons, Japanese manga, or graphic novels.
 - Ask participants if they can remember any famous cartoons, or share memories of their favorite comic strips.
 - Give each participant paper and something to draw with.
 - Using step-by-step directions, demonstrate how to create basic cartoon characters on the white board or flip chart, while participants draw along with you (see Resources).
 - Have each person share his or her cartoon with the group.
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Learning to draw a cartoon character can benefit the brain by stretching it to think in new and inventive ways, which helps to create “cognitive reserve”—new brain cells and increased connections between cells—that can provide a cushion against dementia and memory loss. Try your hand at cartooning by watching an online how-to video, or simply try drawing your favorite cartoon characters.



Expert Opportunity

Invite an artist to teach cartooning. Hire a pro, or find out if anyone among your staff or clients cartoons as a hobby.



Resources

See the Resources section of your online Toolkit for all worksheets, links, and additional materials for this activity.