



TBH Action

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 can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” Humbug! Maybe that’s true when it comes to actual pups, but not when we’re talking about people. Our human brains are capable of taking in new information and mastering new skills throughout our lives—even though it may take us a bit longer as we get older. But that’s all the more reason to challenge ourselves by trying novel activities: Staying intellectually engaged in this way encourages the creation of new brain cells and synapses, which in turn can help protect us from future memory loss.

The best part of this prescription for maintaining brain health is that besides being rewarding, it’s surprisingly easy: No need to earn a second college degree or take up an expensive hobby. All that’s required is making a commitment to trying something that’s totally out of our regular wheelhouse—learning a new language, knitting, playing poker. Even searching the Internet for information about a topic we’re curious about can benefit our brains: Surfing the web requires staying focused, thinking flexibly, and problem-solving.

You Will Need

- “Start Something New” worksheets (see Resources)



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to explain how intellectually challenging activities can boost brain health and prevent memory loss.
 - Ask folks to share things they've always wanted to try but haven't been able to. Discuss some common reasons it can be hard to get started on a new project or intellectual challenge; encourage group to come up with ways to get around specific roadblocks.
 - Have each participant use the worksheet to commit to a new intellectual activity and list specific steps for reaching it.
 - Give each person an opportunity to share his or her goal and game plan for reaching it.
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 - Give each participant the TBH “*Start Something New*” worksheet to complete at home.
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It's as important to stretch your brain as it is to stretch your muscles. The best way to do this? Start something new: Make it an activity that will allow you to try a skill you've never attempted before. It could be learning a new language or taking up knitting or woodworking, but it also can be something as simple as reading aloud to kids at your local library. The further you venture from your element, the greater the benefit to your brain.



Resources

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