

THE HEALTHY BRAIN – SPIRIT

"I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch I've got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it to future generations."

~ George Bernard Shaw

Healthy brains need purpose, perspective, and social connections. To improve your spirit, you need to believe in your ability to influence your own life and its outcomes!

A sense of optimism and a positive outlook are really important; optimistic people have been found to live longer and to be less likely to develop dementia.

Even if you have a life-threatening illness, you still retain the ability to influence many things like your relationships with family and friends, and your ability to enjoy what you are doing in the present moment.

When it comes to maintaining your spirit, there are six areas to focus on:

- Stay Active
- Nurture Your Spirit
- Keep Your Sense of Humour
- Build Solid Friendships
- Treat Depression
- Keep Your Perspective – Contemplating Past, Present and Future

Stay Active

Productive people tend to live longer and be more contented – both of which appear to reduce their risk of developing dementia. Hobbies, community and church groups are excellent ways to stay active and engaged.



Nurture Your Spirit

People who develop or maintain a spiritual dimension to their lives – through meditation, prayer, and spending time in nature – tend to have a more positive outlook. Also, the resulting calmness is restful and a good counter-balance to the business and stress of daily life.

Keep Your Sense of Humour

Humour – especially appreciating, remembering, and telling jokes – can be a wonderful form of brain training, and it helps to lift the spirit.

It can also significantly increase your level of hope, reduce pain, reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and increase a sense of well-being, all of which will help improve your mental fitness.

Build Solid Friendships

It is vital to maintain good social connections. Many activities like dancing, chess, playing cards, and Scrabble combine brain stimulus with socializing and are good ways to interact with others and make friends.

Studies have found that friends are even more valuable for good quality social connections than family members. This is especially good news for people who don't have strong family relationships, or whose families live at a distance.



Treat Depression

Depression, and its close relative *anxiety*, rob life of pleasure and peace of mind. The benefits of overcoming anxiety and depression will impact you over the long term, as well as providing relief from suffering in the present.

When you are anxious and depressed, your world shrinks and you withdraw into yourself. Long-term depression and chronic stress can have a lasting negative impact on brain health and memory, and may increase your risk of developing dementia.

- A handout that explains the symptoms and treatment options for depression can be found at www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/gpac/pdf/depression_pg.pdf

Alternative treatments such as acupuncture, and some spiritual and naturopathic remedies, have also been effective for some people. If you are concerned about depression, discuss your situation with your physician.

Keep Your Perspective – Contemplating Past, Present and Future

Spirituality involves a lifelong commitment involving your past, present, and future. The ability to be comfortable with all three time periods is a key to our spirit and emotional well-being.

The power of the past

Remembering where we have been, who we have known, life events, and all we have learned from life experiences, gives our life both substance and anchoring. Capture these memories so you can share them with future generations and, so you can look back when you want to.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. has launched a new interactive website called Memory Bank – a space where people can share their inspiring stories, memories, and ideas. We believe it is crucial that the loss of memory associated with Alzheimer's disease does not mean the permanent loss of personal stories that help weave the fabric of our society – stories of love, family, struggle, survival, and triumph.

- Visit Memory Bank at www.thememorybank.ca.

The power of the present

Being fully aware (mindful) of each precious moment of life ensures that we are open to the opportunities of the here and now. Being mindful increases focus, and concentration; reduces forgetfulness; and lowers the amount of stress we experience. Meditation and the conscious practice of focusing on what we are doing in the present are important skills to develop.

The power of the future

Optimism is associated with greater mental and physical well-being and longer life. Optimists are happier, healthier and live longer. The ability to face the future – and project into the future – is a key part of mental fitness. This important ability can be eroded by poor mental and emotional fitness. Always have a plan for something that you can look forward to, and always treat depression – which will rob you of the ability to look forward with optimism.

HELP IN SETTING YOUR GOALS

Get inspired! The Hindu concept of 'life stages' suggests that when we become grandparents we should turn away from the world and take up spiritual interests.

At age 102, Leo Hildebrand regularly visited people in his community who were not able to get out and about. He said most of his visits were to what he called "kids and whippersnappers", by which he meant people 80 years old or younger. Leo enjoyed visiting and connecting with others more than playing golf, which he stopped playing at age 100.

Bronze Level

- If work is a dull grind for you, find ways to make it more interesting, or seek out more challenge, get more training, apply for a promotion, or apply for a different job where you will be more stimulated and fulfilled.
- Learn to meditate. Try to meditate at least once a week for 10 minutes, building up to once a week for 20 minutes.
- Develop a sense of spirituality through study, religion, or nature.
- Have a heart-to-heart conversation with a supportive friend or family member at least once a week.

Silver Level

- Meditate at least once a week for 20 minutes, building up to twice a week for 20 minutes.
- Develop a sense of spirituality through study, religion, or nature – perhaps by joining a faith based or spiritual group.
- Have a heart-to-heart conversation with a supportive friend or family member at least twice a week.

Gold Level

- Meditate or pray daily.
- Learn about and apply ways to control stress.
- Build or maintain social connections and connect with emotional confidant daily.
- Be productive so that you feel life has meaning and purpose.
- Entertain friends, neighbours, and people in the community with your musical ability, dancing or memorized poems. Give something back to your community.