MIND GAMES

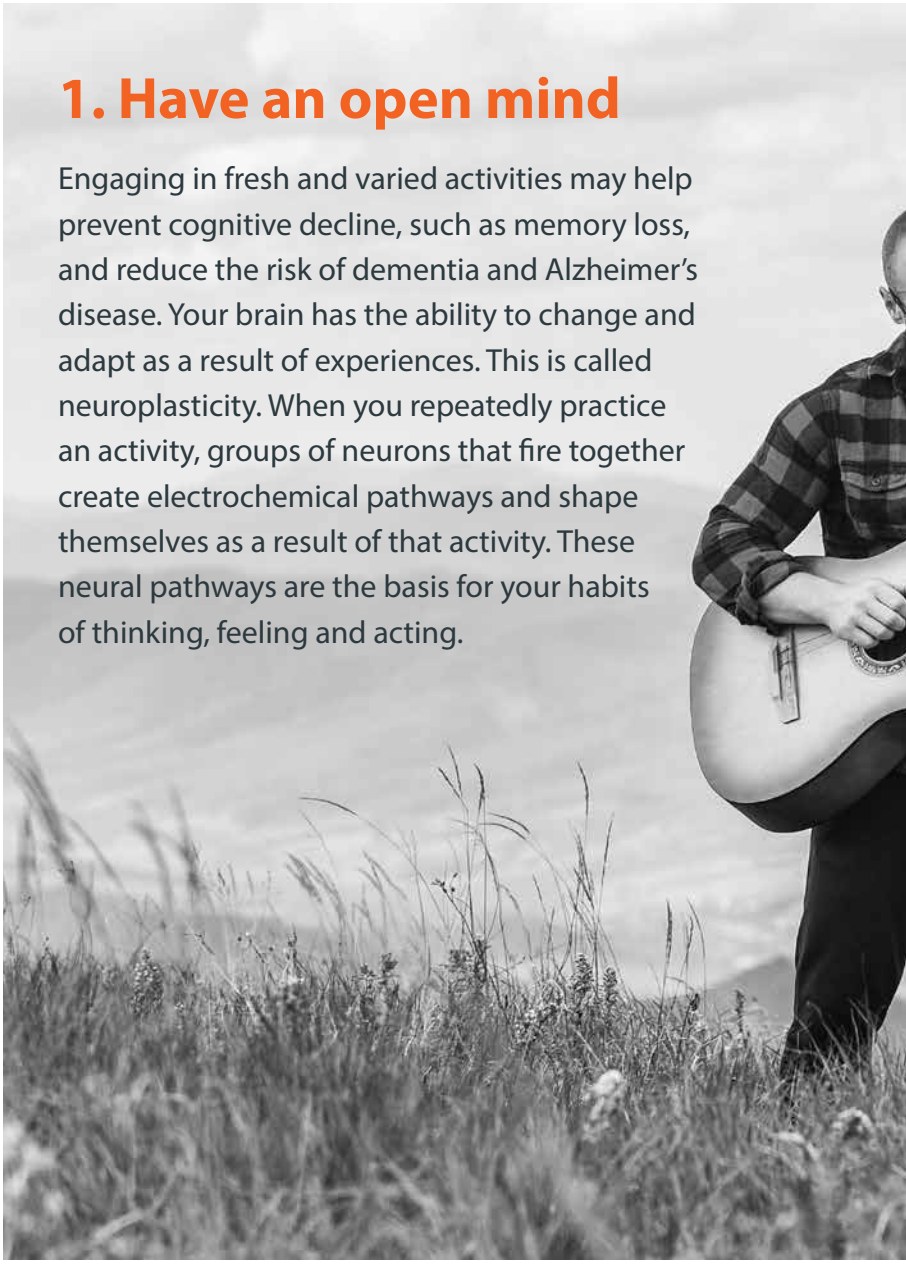
We all know physical exercise is important for our bodies, but have you given any thought to your mental fitness?

Your brain may be the most important organ in your body because it controls so many of your vital functions. And having a healthy brain helps you pay attention, communicate, problem-solve and remember things more easily. So what can you do to keep your brain in tip-top shape?



1. Have an open mind

Engaging in fresh and varied activities may help prevent cognitive decline, such as memory loss, and reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Your brain has the ability to change and adapt as a result of experiences. This is called neuroplasticity. When you repeatedly practice an activity, groups of neurons that fire together create electrochemical pathways and shape themselves as a result of that activity. These neural pathways are the basis for your habits of thinking, feeling and acting.



Good-for-you games

Games (even video games!) boost your brainpower by improving your cognition, visual-spatial reasoning, concentration, short-term memory, processing speed, hand-eye coordination and problem-solving. Try:

- Jigsaw puzzles
- Word searches
- Crossword puzzles
- Sudoku puzzles
- Strategy games, such as chess and checkers
- Card games
- Video games

© 2022 United HealthCare Services, Inc.



2. Adopt a growth mindset

According to psychologist Carol S. Dweck, another important component of brain health is having a **"growth mindset" versus a "fixed mindset."** She sums it up like this: "Individuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies and input from others) have a growth mindset. They tend to achieve more than those with a more fixed mindset (those who believe their talents are innate gifts)." Having a growth mindset can make your brain stronger and smarter.



Stimulating skill-building

Learning how to do something new provides the ultimate brain workout because it improves concentration, attention to detail, memory recall and problem-solving. Try:

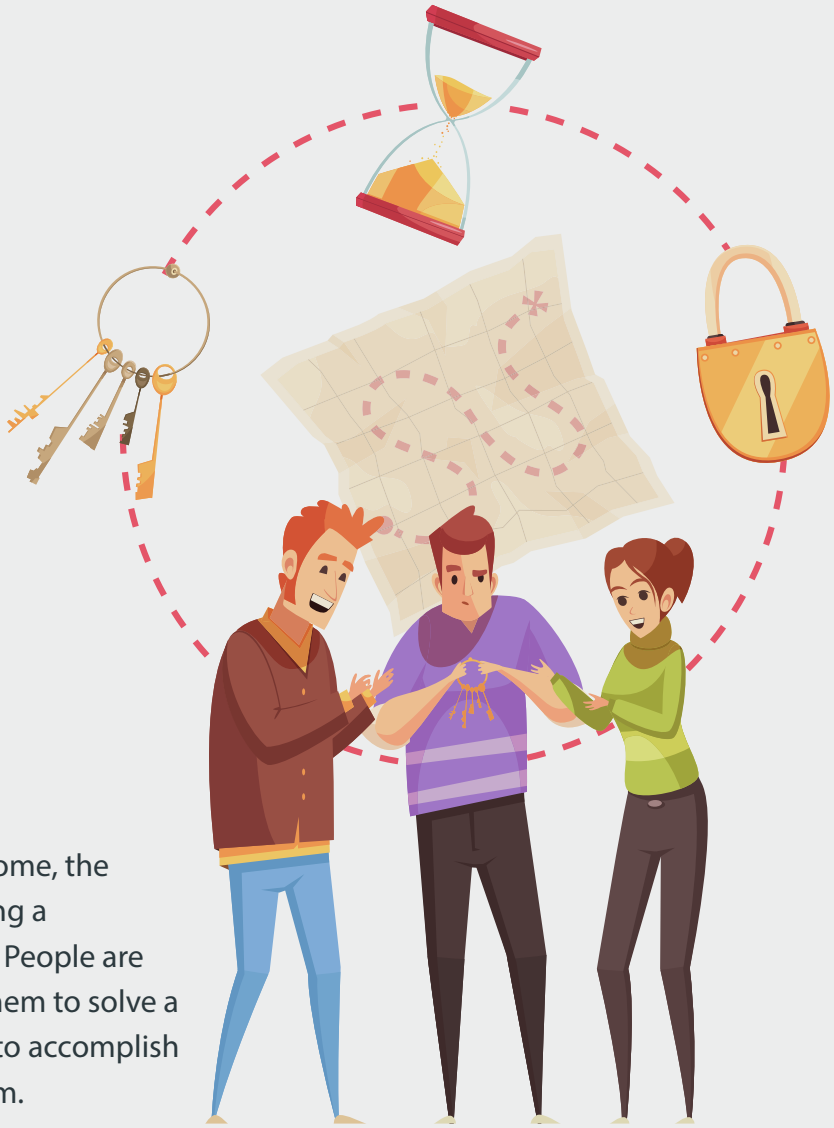
- Playing a new instrument
- Learning a language
- Cooking
- Gardening
- Watching documentaries
- Playing a new sport
- Taking a class



© 2022 United HealthCare Services, Inc.

3. Get social

Socializing helps sharpen memory and cognitive skills, and increases your sense of happiness and well-being. And according to the Alzheimer's Association, a number of studies indicate that maintaining strong social connections and keeping mentally active as we age might lower the risk of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's.



Two activities, in particular, involve both socializing and problem-solving:

1. Escape rooms

While you can devise your own escape room at home, the most popular escape room activity involves visiting a business specialized in setting up themed rooms. People are locked in these rooms to play a game requiring them to solve a series of puzzles within a certain amount of time to accomplish a goal, typically finding the key to unlock the room.



2. Trivia nights

Restaurants, bars and coffee shops across the country host regular trivia nights where groups of customers form teams and work together to answer questions, typically about a specific pop-culture topic. The top teams usually wins a small prize and bragging rights.

© 2022 United HealthCare Services, Inc.

4. Keep your brain on its toes

There has been a recent explosion of "brain training" apps and programs designed to help you focus better at work and school, improve memory, and increase problem-solving skills and processing speeds. In fact, brain training is now a multibillion-dollar industry. But there's no consistent evidence that formal "brain training" works better than exercises and hobbies you can engage in on your own.



Below are some DIY suggestions for keeping your cerebrum sharp. Bonus: These activities also offer other health perks, such as relaxation, increased self-esteem, joy – and some screen-free personal time.

Smart art

Creating art, no matter how skilled or creative you are (or aren't), can improve your visual-spatial reasoning, focus, hand-eye coordination, problem-solving and emotional processing. Try:

- Adult coloring books
- Color or paint by number
- Painting or drawing tutorials
- Writing or journaling
- Knitting or crocheting
- Woodworking
- Calligraphy



Expansive experiences

While routine is important to our health, being open to new experiences also reinforces the "growth mindset," which leads to other brain benefits. Exposure to "novel" stimuli triggers a release of dopamine, which makes us feel happy. Try:

- Traveling
- Attending concerts, musicals or plays
- Watching sporting events
- Visiting a new museum or exhibit
- Cultivating new friendships
- Trying new foods
- Shopping at a thrift store or craft fair



© 2022 United HealthCare Services, Inc.