

**“BRAINWORKS” IN MIDLIFE AND BEYOND:**  
**„БРЪТНА МОКК?” ИА ИАДГЛЕ ВІД БЕЛОД:**  
Good News, Key Facts, and 25 Ways to Promote a Healthier Brain

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**GOOD NEWS!**

WISE, ALERT, SAGE, LEARNED; RICHLY CONNECTED, PATTERN-RECOGNIZING  
**These are the key words associated with our aging brain.** As we age, we are increasingly able to make the “right” call; we have “easy” insight. This is because of a powerful integration process taking place in the brain, as we age, that integrates our cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence, social skills, personal judgment, and our improved ability to self-regulate. This means that, if what you are doing depends on knowledge and experience, you will do very well.

**MORE GOOD NEWS!**

**The growth hormones in your brain are *not* age-related like growth hormones in the body.** This means, if you play your cards right, you can add cognitive reserve and increase the number of neurons and new brain cells you have. *You can increase* your brain’s health and power.

**5 KEY FACTS:**

**FACT 1. The #1 enemy of your brain’s health is stress**  
(anxiety, tension, being scattered/unfocused).

**FACT 2. The most important factor for brain health is circulation**  
(deep breathing, exercise, standing--[sitting deprives your brain of oxygen]).

**FACT 3. When we are proactive and create a healthy lifestyle:**  
**we reduce inner and outer stress** (which reduces cortisol in our body,  
which then reduces the chance of inflammation in our body [the beginning of disease]),  
**we increase endorphins and serotonin**  
(which reduce anxiety, help us sleep, and enable better self-regulation and impulse control), and  
**we improve focus and attention**  
(which helps improve short-term memory).

**FACT 4. As we age, our processing speed seems to slow down.** This means that, if what you are doing depends on speed, you will be somewhat slower than you used to be. Our frontal lobes (center of focus and attention) aren’t as quick and efficient as they used to be in suppressing irrelevant information. When too much irrelevant information gets in, we are distracted, our brain goes into “default” mode; it takes a rest from focusing and---we “forget”, we lose our focus. (Does this feel familiar?) **The fact is, in midlife and beyond, our frontal lobes need a deliberate “push” from us.**

**FACT 5. The lifestyle we choose in midlife, the attitude we hold about aging, and the choices and decisions we make in midlife directly affect our quality of life in later years.** We can make course corrections, along the way, to create a positive difference in our well-being.

## SO, HOW CAN YOU “PLAY YOUR CARDS” RIGHT To Have a Healthier Brain?

The list below includes 25 ways you can promote the health of your brain.

- 1) Put a ✓ by the ones that are already part of your current lifestyle.
- 2) Choose something that you did not check and want to begin doing now. Depending on current health issues, you may want to discuss these with your medical provider.

### 25 WAYS

#### You Can Promote the Health of Your Brain

- \_\_\_ 1. Take the reins of your lifestyle and make conscious, personal choices for your well-being.
- \_\_\_ 2. Have a daily “plan” or regular rhythm for eating and sleeping. (*Your brain loves this!*)
- \_\_\_ 3. Get regular and *restful* sleep.
- \_\_\_ 4. Move; be physically active on a regular basis.
- \_\_\_ 5. Walk briskly and/or do other aerobic exercise 4-5 hours a week.
- \_\_\_ 6. Learn the time-tested tools for reducing stress, in the moment and for the long-term. (*Take a class, read a reliable how-to book, consult with a therapist to learn and practice specific tools.*)
- \_\_\_ 7. Be aware of your self-talk. Your brain only knows what you tell it, so keep your self-talk positive and constructive. Keep a growth (vs. fixed) mindset.
- \_\_\_ 8. Develop *meaningful* social connections and friendships.
- \_\_\_ 9. Laugh at yourself regularly.
- \_\_\_ 10. Do activities with your hands (*gardening, art, exercise, creative movement, handwriting*).
- \_\_\_ 11. Listen to music with a repeating pattern. Drumming is especially effective for the brain.
- \_\_\_ 12. Learn *new* skills or information (*vs. those that focus on what you already know*).
- \_\_\_ 13. Floss your teeth twice each day. It helps to prevent Dementia.
- \_\_\_ 14. Bring nature into your life. (*It rebalances serotonin and oxytocin [cuddle hormone] and these activate each other.*)
- \_\_\_ 15. Take an “extra” breath each day and stay with it for a moment. (*Produces serotonin.*)
- \_\_\_ 16. Touch animals, plant leaves, other people (*We need 8 hugs a day to reduce inner stress.*)
- \_\_\_ 17. Enjoy pleasant aromas. Take time to experience them and notice their effects on you.
- \_\_\_ 18. “Rewire” your brain daily by just noticing & deepening your breathing for 10-20 minutes.
- \_\_\_ 19. Eat whole plant food (vs. processed). (*For more specific information about how diet affects our brain, check out resources, such as Mayo Clinic, Harvard Health Newsletter, UCLA Geriatrics Studies online.*)
- \_\_\_ 20. Play a musical instrument of any kind.
- \_\_\_ 21. Be interested in something and engage with it on a regular basis.
- \_\_\_ 22. Memorize something, such as a poem, interesting facts, definitions of new words.
- \_\_\_ 23. Drink 8-10 ounces of water and other fluids each day. The brain needs hydration.
- \_\_\_ 24. Use memory prompts, such as lists and other reliable reminders.
- \_\_\_ 25. Read material that is engaging for you, and explore your questions and ideas with others.

The brain is complex. Most important of all for improving your brain’s health and efficiency is the first step: Be proactive and take charge of your lifestyle so you can reduce stress, increase endorphins and serotonin, and improve attention and focus. Only you can do this!