

# Tips from a Neurologist: Top 10 Ways to Stay On Top of Your Game

## - Stay Sharp program for Whole Brain Health

People who enrolled in the Stay Sharp program at the AgeWell Brain Center love my trademarked mnemonic of SHARP MINDS, because it gives you the top 10 tips for achieving optimal brain health and to reverse cognitive declines.

### **Sound sleep is paramount to a sound mind**

The latest research on the importance of sleep showed that an average adult needs at least 7.5 hours of sleep. During sleep, your brain does not just go "off-line". Special channels open up in your brain only during sleep. These channels support vital functions like detoxification (freeing our brains of metabolic wastes and harmful substances), and clearing our bodies of pro-inflammatory molecules that negatively affect our brains. Sleep also helps modulate our immune responses, promotes creativity and consolidates learning and memory. Evidence has shown that chronic sleep deprivation leads to increased level of ghrelin and cortisol, the hunger and stress hormone. So, sleeping more not only boost your brainpower, but help you loose fat. Brain-Derived Growth Factor (BDNF), the nurturing substance for brain cells, is released during deep sleep and aerobic exercise.

### **Activities, Movements and Mindfulness are central to a happy brain**

Your brain loves a variety of activities: the more diverse your activities are, the more your brain benefits from the additional boost of the neurotransmitters Dopamine and Serotonin that are essential for your focus, motivation and joy. Aerobic exercise provides robust oxygen flow to your brain, that will increase production of vital youth enhancing hormones like growth hormone, testosterone and BDNF – the "miracle grow" for your brain cells!

### **Let Food be your Medicine and Kitchen be your Pharmacy**

Longevity and brain health experts recommend a "Keto/Flex" diet. Your brain favors Ketone bodies for power especially in the morning. To achieve your sharpest focus and maximum endurance, I recommend eating only protein and good fats like organic ghee butter or MCT oil for breakfast and hold any carbohydrate intake until lunch and dinner. Many of us know that polyphenols and antioxidants are neuroprotective and if you get most of these from your diet you won't need to spend as much on supplements. Personally I try my best to consume 9 cups of vegetable/fruit daily: 3 greens, 3 colored (deeply pigmented) and 3 brassicas/sulfur (cauliflower, cabbage, onion and garlic etc.).

### **Keep the P.I.S.S.S. from harming your brain**

**Pills** - All pharmaceuticals (including over-the-counter analgesics) carry side effects once they have entered your body, and there is a good chance you are not aware of them. Most will deplete or block absorption of many vital nutrients. For example, proton pump inhibitors for acid reflux blocks the absorption of B vitamins that are critical for the nervous system. Cholesterol drugs called statins have a long list of adverse effects; the worse of all is its association in causing neurodegenerative diseases. If you must take a statin, it is critical that you also take CoQ10, a very important antioxidant used by your mitochondria

(engines for your cells) to prevent DNA damage.

Sedatives benzodiazepines like Valium, Xanax and Klonopin that are commonly prescribed have been shown to accelerate cognitive decline. One should not stop any prescribed medications without consulting with your doctors; but more importantly, you can explore alternatives to pharmaceuticals by working with clinicians who are willing to seek out the root causes of your symptoms and help you reduce your medication burden.

**Inflammation/Injury** - Inflammation causes brain fog, irritability and insomnia, not to mention weight gain and chronic fatigue. People who sustained traumatic brain injury (TBI) are 3 to 5 times likely to develop dementia, with middle-aged men having the highest risks.

**Stress** - While stress has been deemed the "21st Century silent killer, neuroscientists now have irrefutable evidence that stress hormone cortisol, when unregulated, actually kills brain cells particularly in the hippocampus, your short term memory consolidation and learning center. In simplistic terms, cortisol makes a person fat, tired and dumb. Therefore, cortisol modulation is central in the Stay Sharp brain optimization program.

**Sugar** - While we all know the negative effects of sweets to our teeth and waistlines, sugar and almost all sugar substitutes are actually neurotoxins that accelerate cell death.

**Sedentary lifestyle** - Finally, as a longevity and anti-aging doctor, I applaud the phrase: "sitting is the new smoking". If your job requires sitting for hours a day try to get a balance ball chair or standing station.

Many of you who have encountered my articles over the years are familiar with my individualized approach for cognitive priming. Inside your skull is the most beautiful, complex yet vulnerable master organ. Your brain is what makes you unique. So it should come as no surprise that in order to achieve your brain's optimum function, you need to investigate where your

vulnerabilities are, in order to get to your goals most efficiently. Testing for unhealthy kinds of fat, damaged proteins and DNAs can guide you to the right kinds of supplements by assessing what you need most. Certain heavy metals (mercury and lead, for example) and environmental toxins, can cross into the brain and cause irreversible damage so testing and detoxing these dangerous metals are important and you won't know unless you look.

While one cannot avoid stress, there are many ways to modulate your cortisol response. Optimizing hormones with Bio identical Hormone Replacement Therapy (BHRT) becomes important if you are over 40, because most neurosteroids that are critical to brain cells start to decline with age. It is also important to optimize your thyroid and adrenal hormones. If your labs show "normal range" yet you have having symptoms of low thyroid (low energy, dull mood and brain fog, etc.) then it is very likely that your test results would show levels that are not optimal and deserve further investigations for these alarming symptoms that could lead to poor brain function! To take steps further to help regenerate lost brain cells and to reach higher physical, emotional and cognitive goals for many of my successful and extremely busy clients, I often test and correct levels for growth hormone and leptin (master fat and hunger regulator that targets your brain), which are both powerful factors in maintaining youthfulness, longevity and optimal body composition.

As I mentioned in last month's article, Alzheimer's dementia is actually a midlife brain-harming process that manifests in late life. It is a tragic, vicious and prevalent disease that will likely place

great stress on the future resources of our country. Prevention is critical as there is no cure. I encourage you to start today to practice some of my SHARP MINDS strategies. As you can see, many tips I mentioned here do not cost any money to start and these are factors you can control, and would recommend before you see me for further testing, supplements and brain-targeted therapies!

Eva Henry, M.D.



**Dr. Eva Henry is board-certified in Neurology and Anti-Aging, Regenerative Medicine. Her passion is to utilize an integrative approach to prevent and treat neurological illnesses.**

## Top 10 ways to stay on top of your game

SHARP

MINDS

S - Sleep

H - Hormones

A - Activity

R - Regenerate

P - Poison (Toxins) Pharmaceuticals

M - Movements / Mindfulness

I - Inflammation, Infection, Injury (TBI), Insulin Resistance

N - Nutrients

D - Decompress, Detox

S - Sugar, Stress, Sedentary

Be Mindful of SHARP MINDS - Avoid/Reduce P.I.S.S.S.