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KEEPING YOUR BRAIN YOUNG WITH MUSIC

Music, both playing and listening, stimulates more parts of the brain than any other activity. In fact, music occupies even more areas of our brains than language does.

We all know that exercise is good for the body, so we slip into running shoes for a jog around the block. If you want to exercise your brain at the same time, put on some headphones and listen to music.

"There are few things that exercise the brain the ways music does," say researchers at Johns Hopkins. Listening to music can improve memory, mental alertness and mood as well as blood pressure and pain.

BRAIN BOOSTS FROM MUSIC

Try these methods of bringing more music — and improved brain function — into your life.

RECALL A MEMORY FROM THE PAST. Put on a familiar hit from long ago. Try to remember where you were and who you were with when you first heard the tune.

CONCENTRATE WITH MUSIC. Not everyone likes Mozart or jazz. Pay attention to how you react to different styles of music. Pick a style that works for you. What helps you focus and concentrate might be distracting to someone else. That's why we have headphones!

JUMP-START YOUR CREATIVITY. Try listening to music that's not from your generation. We tend to listen to the same genre of music that we listened to in our teens and 20s. New music challenges the brain in ways that familiar music doesn't.

SING! Singing releases endorphins, the brain's "feel good" hormone. Choral singing appears to be especially helpful. It may reduce depression and anxiety. Singing can be an aerobic activity that gets more oxygen to your brain, which boosts mood.

LEARN AN INSTRUMENT. A study of older adults who took piano lessons found that attention, memory and problem-solving skills improved. You don't have to be the next Herbie Hancock or Lang Lang, just get the piano tuned and take a few lessons.

QUICKTAKES



STAY SHARP

When you learn new things, you engage your brain. Mental activities may help build up a supply of brain cells and the links between them. You might even grow new brain cells. Challenging your brain has many health benefits. It can be fun, too.

Different activities can "work" different areas of your brain. For instance:

- Chess and other strategy games strengthen the brain's frontal lobe.
- Active, coordinated movements like ballroom dancing or playing tennis train spatial skills.
- Reading maps can increase the size of the hippocampus in the right side of the brain.
- Reading activates nerve cells in the occipital and parietal lobes of the brain.

MUSIC AND DEMENTIA

Dementia is the general term for loss of mental abilities that's severe enough to interfere with daily life. It often comes with old age. Dementia is caused by physical changes in the brain. Participating in musical activities may delay the onset of dementia by as much as five years. But what about people who already show signs of dementia? Can music help them?

For people with dementia, music has the power to boost mood and improve both mental and physical function. A person's ability to process rhythm and music remains intact even as other abilities disappear.

If you have a friend or loved one with dementia, consider including music when you're together. Some suggestions:

- Dance! Go out dancing or dance in the house.
- Listen to music that the person liked in the past.
- Encourage someone who has played an instrument in the past to try it again.
- Attend a concert together. Factor in ease of access and endurance when choosing the venue.
- Play music or sing as your companion walks to improve balance and gait.
- Put on soothing background music to improve mood.
- Exercise together to music.

Keep in mind that a person with dementia may hear music differently than you do. If they complain that a piece of music sounds horrible, turn it off.

Sources: Alzheimer's Foundation of America (alzfdn.org/EducationandCare/musictherapy.html), Johns Hopkins Medicine (hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy_aging/healthy_mind/keep-your-brain-young-with-music)

CHINESE BEEF WITH BROCCOLI

SERVES 4

Dark green veggies like broccoli are believed to be good for brain health. At the very least, this easy stir-fry is good for dinner!

INGREDIENTS

2 navel oranges, scrubbed
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
1 teaspoon cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
3/4 pound beef sirloin or bottom round
1 large bunch broccoli
2 teaspoons olive oil
1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal
3 - 4 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons water

NUTRITIONAL INFO PER SERVING

276 Calories	12g Carbohydrates
16g Fat	3g Fiber
6g Saturated fat	358mg Sodium
0g Trans fat	72mg Calcium

Source: Healthy Living Kitchens



DIRECTIONS

1. Peel 2 or 3 long strips of zest from one of the oranges. Slice the long strips into very thin short strips. Put the strips in a mixing bowl. Squeeze the juice from both oranges into the bowl. Add soy sauce, ginger, sesame oil, cornstarch and pepper flakes.
2. Slice the meat across the grain into very thin strips. Add the beef strips to the orange marinade and toss to coat. Let stand for 10 minutes.
3. Peel broccoli stalks. Thinly slice the stalks on the diagonal. Cut the crowns into small florets.
4. In a wok or large skillet, heat 1 teaspoon of the oil over medium-high heat. Add the beef, reserving the marinade. Stir-fry for 3 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
5. Add the remaining 1 teaspoon oil to the pan. Add the broccoli and scallions. Cook, stirring, for 2 minutes. Add 2 tablespoons water. Cover and cook until the broccoli is crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Add garlic and the reserved marinade: cook until the mixture thickens slightly. Return the beef to the pan and cook until heated through.