

# Your Mind Matters

## Preserve Your Brain Health for Your Best Life



### FEATURED ARTICLE

## Variety is the Spice of Life

### **Age-related brain-changes happen to everyone.**

You'll likely begin seeing it in your 40's, even if you're going to work, running errands and taking care of your families. It happens behind the scenes, and you may not even notice if you're not paying attention.

### **Why does this happen?**

The answer is related to *brain-volume*. Your brain naturally tends to get smaller as you get older.

Each day, you navigate routines, doing the same things in the same ways each day, utilizing the same pathways in your brain over and over again without change. Because of this, you're neglecting the surrounding brain pathways associated with skills that you don't practice often.

Once those neglected pathways begin to diminish, your brain volume – or brain size – begins to diminish as well. That's when you'll notice things changing.

You might find that you have more trouble finding words and names, attention and focus become more elusive and you may lose the thread of conversation more easily.

### **What can you do to maintain your brain-volume?**

#### **CHANGE YOUR ROUTINES!**

Everyone loves routines - *they're comfortable*.

They get you through your day quickly and effortlessly, *without having to think*.

You may tell yourself that you've got everything under control, but routines may do more harm than good. That's because getting stuck in a routine closes the window to the possibilities for better ways to do things.

Routines do allow you to navigate your day *without thinking*, allowing you to *shut down* your brain. But *why have a brain when the goal is to shut it down?* There's a better, more brain-healthy way.

Changing the way you do routine tasks will coax your brain to think more creatively. That's because variety wakes up your brain and piques your interest. In a nutshell, *changing your routines and doing things differently encourage creative thinking and problem-solving*.

## FEATURED ARTICLE

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Even if you decide not to change anything about how you accomplish a specific task, just the act of exploring new ways to do it will light up your brain's sense of curiosity and novelty.

Encouraging yourself to make a change will encourage the creation of new brain pathways and connections. Simply put, new brain pathways and connections translate to a bigger and better-working brain!

By Marilyn Abrahamson - Brain-Health Education Specialist at Ceresti Health.

### REDUCE YOUR RISKS

## Reduce Your Risk by Reducing Your Stress

Chronic stress has been identified as a risk factor that can increase your risk for developing dementia. It can cause anxiety, insomnia, moodiness, sadness, anger, irritability, or problems focusing. If you're using medication or alcohol to cope with these feelings, schedule a visit with your doctor.

In the meantime, here are a few things that can help:

1. **Know your triggers:** Once you identify what causes you stress, evaluate whether or not you can eliminate some, or even all of them.
2. **Talk about how it:** Talk can help or hurt. Rehashing old resentments can make stress worse, but talking to a trusted family member, friend or licensed counselor can help.
3. **Establish boundaries:** Knowing you're taking control of your own boundaries can be empowering, and it lets others know your limits.
4. **Steal some "me" time:** Sometimes, you just need a change of scenery, even if it's just for a few minutes a day.
5. **Don't sweat the small stuff:** Stress can erode your coping skills. Stopping to evaluate the urgency of a situation can do wonders for your perspective.
6. **Learn which stress management techniques work for you.**

**Yoga** is one of the healthiest ways to relieve stress. If balance or flexibility is an issue, try chair yoga.

**Meditation** can improve mindfulness so you can stop worrying about the past or the future and appreciate the "now".

**Making time to laugh** is the best way to relieve stress. Find ways to bring more laughter into your life. Try looking for videos with short clips from your favorite comedy shows like *"The Honeymooners"*.

Stay consistent with the strategies that help you the most, and you should notice a difference in your stress levels, making you feel better overall.

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For more information about brain health or caregiver support please visit the **Ceresti Brain Health Education portal** at [brainhealth.ceresti.com](https://brainhealth.ceresti.com) and enter code **BRAIN2022**.

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## GROW YOUR BRAIN

# Grow Your Brain with Chopsticks

If you're not used to it, eating with chopsticks can be a challenging (and exasperating) way to get through a meal.

If you've tried it before or if you're an expert at using them now, you may remember your first time. In the beginning, much of your food ended up falling between the sticks. If you stuck with it, by the end of the meal more reached your mouth than fell into your lap.

### **Why does practice equal better performance?**

As you practice a new task, your brain begins to make connections that translate into better quality performance – and this repetition is what helps your brain stay voluminous - and prevents it from shrinking as you get older.

### ***That's what Neurobic exercises are all about.***

Eating with chopsticks is a perfect example of a *Neurobic exercise* - doing something new and different to light up different areas of the brain.

Plus, the chopsticks can slow you down, allowing you to eat more mindfully, and giving you the time to ponder the flavors and the textures of the food. Closing your eyes as you slowly chew, taste and swallow the food will amplify this benefit.

Eating this way is better for your digestion too, but that's just a bonus.

If you're already adept at eating with chopsticks, no worries. You can keep it Neurobic just by switching to your non-dominant hand. Using chopsticks with your non-dominant hand? *What could be more of a challenge than that?*

Remember, you don't have to wait until you order Chinese take-out to use chopsticks. Try it at your next meal, no matter what you're eating!

*\*\*All of the Neurobic exercises in the Grow Your Brain section of the Your Mind Matters Newsletters are based on excerpts from the book "Keep Your Brain Alive" by Dr. Lawrence Katz and Manning Rubin. Workman Publishing, New York.*

## BRAIN HEALTH MINUTE

### IT'S NUTS!

Can a snack help support your healthy brain?

[Scientists say yes!](#) Pop a handful of walnuts and you'll be eating a brain-healthy plant-based snack rich in alpha linolenic acid, polyphenols and Omega 3 fatty acids. All of these are determined to be critical brain nutrients that can help counter oxidative stress and inflammation, both of which have been linked to cognitive decline.

*So, think before you snack - and choose one that will help you move forward on your journey to a healthier brain!*

As a supplemental benefit of your health plan, you have access to a caregiver support program available through Ceresti Health at no cost to you.  
 To determine if you are eligible for this program, contact: (877) 222-5055.

## MONTHLY BRAIN CHALLENGE

# The Secret Word - A Critical Thinking Exercise



Critical thinking is one of our most important executive function skills, allowing us to think with accuracy and examine relevant facts.

**Figure out the secret eight-letter word using the clues below.**

Each clue will give you the position of the letters in the secret word. Follow the clues, writing the letters in the spaces below until you complete the word.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8

1. The spelling of letters 4, 8, 5 and 6 describes the lowest point on your face.
2. The spelling of letters 5, 6, 4 and 1 are a unit of length equal to 1/12th of a foot.
3. The spelling of letters 4, 3 and 7 describes a popular pet.
4. The spelling of letters 7, 5, 6 and 2 describes something that is very small.

The secret word is **HYACINTH**

1. The spelling of letters 4, 8, 5 and 6 describes the lowest point on your face. CHIN
2. The spelling of letters 5, 6, 4 and 1 are a unit of length equal to 1/12 of a foot. INCH
3. The spelling of letters 4, 3 and 7 describes a popular pet. CAT
4. The spelling of letters 7, 5, 6 and 2 describes something that is very small. TINY

1. The spelling of letters 4, 8, 5 and 6 describes the lowest point on your face. CHIN
2. The spelling of letters 5, 6, 4 and 1 are a unit of length equal to 1/12 of a foot. INCH

## ANSWERS