

Q&A with brain health expert  
Dr. Paul Nussbaum

What are some tips for young people to keep their brains healthy?

First, understand the basics of the brain. Your brain weighs on average three pounds. It is about 60% fat. It demands 25% of the blood from every heartbeat, and most importantly, the brain can be shaped. Understand that your lifestyle, and the environments you place your brain into each day, will have consequences. What we do behaviorally has an impact, not only on the function, but the structure of the brain. You must be very much into a brain health lifestyle.

How can we use more of our brain?

It is in the world of novelty and complexity in which you will get the biggest return in brain development. That is, when you engage in things that are hard and things that are new. At first it's not going to be comfortable, it is not going to be easy. But over time, a really neat thing happens. You get more comfortable, and what is happening physiologically is you are building up the brain cells that help you do those things. That's really what is going on here at DI.

What if I think I'm not smart?

If you think you are not a smart person, then you are getting into the realm of self-perceptions. And when you think negative things, your brain gets deflated, believe it or not. The goal for each of us should be not to compare ourselves to others, but to compare ourselves to our potential. We should ask, "what can I do to be a little better?"

Are girls smarter than boys?

Girls have more adaptive brains than boys. They tend to use both sides of their brains more often than men. Men tend to react to stress by either fighting or fleeing. Women will *tend and befriend* the stressor. Women outlive men, especially in America, so maybe not what you would call smarter, but certainly more adaptable.

What can we eat to make our brains more healthy?

Two major food groups. Omega 3 fatty acids, which is a fancy descriptor for good fats. Salmon, herring, tuna, mackerel, sardines, unsalted, fresh. Eat about six to eight ounces of fish per week. The other major food group is called antioxidants, fruits and vegetables. Eat about eight fistfuls of vegetables a day. Also, nuts, unsalted, beans are very good, and green leafy vegetables.

What things are bad for our brains?

Anything on the label that says trans fats, put it back. Those are very bad fats. They will slow your brain down, cause a diabetic brain, stroke, hypertension, even Alzheimer's. Avoid all processed foods. Anything with filler in it is not good. Fast foods are very, very bad for us. The whole organic food movement is expensive, but it is healthier for us.

What else is good for our brains?

There is a whole new field now called neurotheology, which is fascinating. The whole relationship of the appreciation of God and the brain; your spiritual being. We are all spiritual animals. That might mean formalized religious practice. It might mean we get into a place where we settle, we calm down, where we stabilize the brain. Deep breathing is very, very important, particularly as you exhale. The inhalation will set off that stress response, the exhalation will set off that relaxation response. Prayer has been shown on a daily basis to enhance the immune system. Meditation in the next five years will be part and parcel of every mainstream medical system and healthcare practice.