

TRANSITIONS

KEEPING OUR MEMORY SHARP

As we age, our most important goal is to stay healthy. This includes keeping our memory sharp. To maintain a sharp memory, there are important steps that everyone should follow. As far as when to begin, start right now. Actually, the best time to start is in your early 60's, twenty years before cognitive changes begin. Children observing cognitive changes in aging parents are more likely to start these steps than others, but all of us need to continue to maintain a healthy memory.

Some revealing concepts came from discussions with a longtime friend and client, who is a wise 94-year-old retired doctor who is studying the aging brain. The essence of his work is that the key to longevity is "resilience". This process is straightforward, but very individualized. And it takes some experimentation to get it right for each person.

The most important step is to participate in an ongoing program of physical exercise. It is important this is done in conjunction with your primary care physician. Go to a physical fitness center three times a week to work out, focusing on cardiovascular and balance strengthening exercises. The other days can include regular exercise of walking and yoga.

Diet is a part of this process. Here the key to success lies in individualizing your nutrition program. The most frequently recommended program is the Mediterranean diet, successfully used by the French and Italians for centuries. Cookbooks like *Blue Zone Kitchen* illustrate diets in areas of the world where people live to be over age 100.

Also, you need to exercise your brain. Each day, mentally challenge yourself, rather than continuing a repetitive, pleasant pastime. Stretch your mind by doing something that is not easy. Be creative. Take on a challenge that is out of your comfort zone, such as arguing



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a viewpoint, perhaps a political position, that is the opposite from which you agree. Change the genre of books you read. Learn a new language. If you like working with computer systems, challenge yourself with a class on painting landscapes.

The key to exercising your brain is personal involvement. Get engaged in something that gives you a good reason to be alive. This will naturally involve new critical thinking, step by step sequencing, all while learning something new. This means saying no to the volunteer stuff you really do not like, so you can focus on something that is fascinating to you.

What better example of practicing resilience than a wise doctor studying the aging brain. Today he seems as mentally sharp as he was 35 years ago, which is why I am sharing with you this concept of resilience.



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