

## 4 Exercises to Sharpen Your Brain

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### 1. Use your non-dominant hand

Tackling new tasks improves brain capacity in younger people and has a restorative effect on mental faculties that are declining. Boost your brain power right now by performing everyday activities with your non-dominant hand. If you're right-handed, use your left hand to eat, drink, comb your hair, and brush your teeth. Try writing your name with your non-dominant hand or put your mouse pad on the other side of the keyboard.

Why does this work? The human brain starts declining after the age of 30 especially in women with each successive pregnancy. By exercising your brain through the use of non-dominant hand, you are stimulating the opposite side of the brain and activating blood flow, which [slows down the brain aging process](#) and improves mental capacity. Evidence from functional brain imaging shows that the process of neuroplasticity -- the brain's natural ability to form new connections -- can be enhanced by studying new things, especially hand-eye coordinated exercises like developing the use of your non-dominant hand and [practicing visualization meditation](#). For an effective guided visualization that will also increase your years, check out [Meditations to Live to Be 100](#).

Stimulating communication between the two hemispheres even helps physical balance. Mind-body exercises like [tai chi](#) coach people to use the right and left side of the body equally. Try switching it up in sports. For instance, in tennis, switch the racquet to your non-dominant side and play.

### 2. Work out your brain

You have to use it or lose it! You can work out your mind just like you work out your body. Mental exercises that will keep your brain fit include doing crossword puzzles, playing chess, or memorizing names, shopping lists, and phone numbers. When I was a

young boy, to keep my brain function strong, my father had me memorize Tang Dynasty poetry. Every day I had to memorize a new poem and recite it back. Learn the words to a poem or a new song and repeat them back from memory. Set aside the calculator and add manually instead. Keep challenging yourself with tasks that are new to you.

Whatever mental exercise you choose, the key to success is to practice every day at the same time; you are developing and activating new neural pathways, and consistent cycles will keep the brain on track.

### **3. Move your fingers to improve your brain**

Many people marvel that Asian children seem so intelligent. It could be because they use their fingers more frequently. They eat with chopsticks and at one time, they used to compute with an abacus in school. In fact, some studies have been done with children who use an abacus daily, and findings show that engaging the fingers stimulates nerve endings that go directly to the brain, increasing circulation. Take advantage of this by practicing motor activities that use your fingertips, like crocheting, knitting, and other arts and crafts where you are manipulating small parts. Try playing the piano or a stringed instrument.

Here is an exercise you can do anywhere, at any time. Put one finger on top of the one next to it, then try to stack the next finger on top of that. Or hold a pencil or pen between your index and middle fingers, roll it over until it's balanced between the middle and ring fingers, then again to between the ring finger and pinky. This exercise has a beneficial impact on brain health for anyone at any age, but especially for people in their 40s, 50s and beyond -- when signs of brain aging starts to set in.

Why does this work? A map of the brain shows that the nerve endings on your fingertips correspond to more areas of the brain than any other body area, except perhaps the tongue and lips. Therefore, finger exercise and movements can be useful in stimulating the neurons in the brain. The National Institute of Mental Health conducted experiments that showed finger exercises enlarged the capacity of the participants' brains, increased connections between neurons, forged new neural pathways, and increased circulation to the brain areas. The researchers concluded that finger exercise contributed significantly to brain plasticity, the ability of the brain to renew itself. Increased circulation means more oxygen and nutrients for the brain cells and decreased waste products that clog up the brain.

#### 4. Stimulate brain acuity with self-massage

To improve concentration and memory try this self-massage that stimulates two easy-to-find [acupressure](#) points on your neck at the base of the skull. Cross your hands behind you with the palms cradling the back of your head, your thumbs in the grooves on each side of your neck, and your index fingers crossing one another below the skull, just above the thumbs. Sit in a chair, lean your head back, and let it rest against the pressure of your thumbs and index fingers. Slowly inhale deeply through your nose and exhale through your mouth, letting your whole body relax. Do this for three to five minutes. You'll increase blood flow to the brain and at the same time relax the neck muscles, which often tense up in response to stress, constricting blood vessels in the area.

You can find these, and many other brain boosting tips in my new book, [Second Spring](#). I invite you to visit often and share your own personal health and longevity tips with me.

May you live long, live strong, and live happy!

--Dr. Mao

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