LIGHT UP YOUR BRAIN-

Easy Ways To A More Agile Mind!

BRAIN NOTES:
What is Brain Gym?

Brain Gym is a series of 26 exercises or activities, done with intention and designed to ‘wake-up’ the brain or to stimulate brain function. The idea is that these simple exercises strengthen the relationship between body and mind.

Brain Gym exercises also improve focus. Participants repeat the exercises regularly and slowly concentrating on the movement. There is often a noticeable improvement in memory, concentration, relationships, communication, as well as physical coordination.²

Participants need to be focused and present (i.e. mindful) during the exercises. The exercises stimulate certain areas of the brain to not only improve function, but to also improve the integration between brain parts and links between the two hemispheres.

Individuals often rely more heavily on one hemisphere of the brain and underutilize the other, particularly in times of stress. That means the other side of the brain is under used, therefore the person may not be functioning optimally.

Many of the Brain Gym exercises are “Cross Lateral” exercises. “Cross Lateral” means one side of your body crosses the midline to coordinate with the limbs on the other side of your body so that sides of your brain are being used at the same time increasing nerve communication between the two sides of your brain. These kinds of movements force your brain to “talk to itself” forcing both hemispheres to work together resulting in better quality thinking.

The idea is to strengthen the connections between left and right brain activity, strengthen neural pathways and improve coordination. When your brain works better your whole body works better and you have an increased sense of well-being. These exercises can be used by everyone.

1 SOURCE: Adapted from - The Brain Gym program was developed by Paul E. Dennison and Gail E. Dennison and grew out of Educational Kinesiology also called Educational Kinesiology or Movement Therapy. Here is an article which focuses on one of the exercises; http://heartsatplay.com/the-cross-crawl-a-remarkable-movement/. Or if you are interested in Educational Kinesiology and Brain Gym http://www.braingym.org.uk/about-edu-k/

2 It is not 100% clear how and why this happens the thinking is that the activities exercise certain areas of the brain and strengthen neurological pathways that may not be well used otherwise.
SAMPLE BRAIN GYM EXERCISES

SHOULDER SHRUGS
• Slowly lift both shoulders up toward your ears
• Slowly lower both shoulders back to neutral
• Repeat several times

SHOULDER ROLLS
• Slowly lift both shoulders up toward your ears;
• Slowly roll both shoulders forward in a circle. Repeat several times
• Change direction and slowly roll both shoulders backward in a circle
• Repeat several times.

THINKING CAPS
• Hold your ears
• Slowly roll your ear lobes between your index fingers and thumbs

BRAIN BUTTONS
• Take 1 hand and spread it so there is as wide a space as possible between the thumb & index finger.
• Place your index finger & your thumb into the slight indentions just below your collar bone on each side of your sternum
• Press lightly in a rhythmic, pulsing manner
• At the same time, put your other hand over your stomach
• Gently press these points for about 2 minutes

FINGER CIRCLES
• With each hand, squeeze your forefinger & thumb together
• Stretch out your hands in front of your face
• Trace large circles in the same direction
• Now trace circles in the other direction
• Now try the opposite direction with each hand
• With your elbows at shoulder level, practice making big circles, then small circles, forward and backward

RUB-A-DUBS
• Take either hand & gently rub your hand in a circular motion on your tummy
• Stop, then gently pat the top of your head with the other
• Now, do both at the same time and keep a similar pace
• You should be rubbing your tummy whilst patting your head
• Change hands and repeat
LAZY 8s
- Extend one arm in front of you with your thumb pointing up
- In the air, trace the shape of a Figure 8 lying on its side
- Use slow, large movements
- Focus your eyes on your thumb
- Without moving your head, trace three Figure 8s in successively larger movements
- Change hands and repeat
- Now clasp both hands together thumbs facing up and try it

CROSS CRAWL – MARCH ACROSS
- This is an example of “Cross-Lateral” movement
- You may either stand or sit to do the activity
- Take your RIGHT hand across your body and touch your LEFT knee as you raise it off of the floor
- Then do the move on the opposite side taking your LEFT hand across your body and touching your RIGHT knee as you raise it
- Do the movements as if you were marching
- Repeat for 2 minutes

INVISIBLE LETTERS
- Extend 1 arm out in front of you
- Hold an imaginary pencil in your fingers with your arm extended out in front of your face
- Write the first letter of your first name in the air
- Say the letter out loud
- Try to write the same letter backwards
- Try writing the same letter with your nose!
- Watch the person next to you and try to guess what letter it is they are writing
- Now try writing the letter with your ear, now the other ear!

NAME IN THE AIR
- With your hand write your first name in the air
- Use large movements forward and backward
- Use your other hand to write your first name in the air
- Write your name in the air with both hands at the same time
- Now try it with your eyes closed!

MIRROR ME OR FOLLOW THE LEADER
- Get a partner
- Face each other
- Play “Follow The Leader”; one copies slow movements made by the other
- Start making different movements with your face
- Now with your arms
- Change Leaders
30 SECOND CHALLENGE

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

The Idea? The activity boosts the following brain functions:
WORD GAMES

THE IDEA? Playing word games like SCRABBLE improves memory and increase brain processing speed.

GOAL: Increase your word power and your brain power
An anagram rearranges the letters of one word or phrase to make another word or phrase. For example, an anagram for CLINT EASTWOOD could be OLD WEST ACTION.

ACTIVITY: Write your own first name down and see how many hidden words you can find. Then try using your first and last name.

HELPFUL HINTS:
- Always use capital letters.
- Write the words backward or in a circle. This takes your mind off of the original words and its meaning, and it helps you see the many options available.
- It may also help to write each letter on a small index card and shuffle the cards around on the table.

JUST FOR FUN: Whoever you meet today, try to come up with at least one anagram from his/her name.

ABCS ANYONE?
DIRECTIONS:
- Choose a partner.
- Sit facing each other.
- Take turns reciting the alphabet out loud, attaching a word to each letter.
  - For example, “A, animal; B, boat; C, castle, and so on.
  - Go through all 26 letters then change and your partner does the same thing.
  - The second person should try to not use any of the same words as the first person but come up with new words.
  - A variation is to attach a specific type of word to each letter, for example a noun.

VARIATION 1 Recite the alphabet and attach 2 words to each letter.
VARIATION 2 When you’re ready, attach 3, then 4 words to each letter as you recite the alphabet.
VARIATION 3 Recite the alphabet backwards.

THE IDEA? Improve memory & increase brain processing speed
SEEK PERSPECTIVE

When we see things in a new light, we might find better ways to solve a problem, more efficient ways of approaching work, or more effective ways to communicate with one another.

ACTIVITY: List the SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD” Talk about the answers in your tale group.

What might happen if you changed your perception of the question?
IDEAS YOUR BRAIN MIGHT LIKE

SPREAD YOUR WINGS AND SOAR HIGH
Studies, like the notable MacArthur study, have shown that keeping the mind active with jigsaw puzzles and other mind-flexing activities can actually lead to a longer life expectancy, a better quality of life, and reduce our chances of developing certain types of mental illness, including memory loss, dementia, and even Alzheimer’s Disease (by an amazing third).

How does this simple toy accomplish such amazing things? Most likely it is due to the simultaneous use of both sides of the brain. The left brain hemisphere, our analytical side, sees all of the separate pieces and attempts to sort them out logically. The right brain hemisphere, our creative side, sees the “big picture” and works intuitively. Both types of thinking are required in order to successfully piece the puzzle together. In exercising both sides of the brain at the same time, we create actual “connections” between the left and right sides, as well as connections between individual brain cells. These connections increase our ability to learn, to comprehend, and to remember. In addition, completing a puzzle, or even just the

Jigsaw puzzles are a unique activity that allows us to achieve a state of creative meditation, while providing a fun activity that imparts a sense of accomplishment. The benefits to the brain are becoming clearer.
Boost the Power of Your Creative Mind

Creativity isn’t just for artists or poets. We all use creativity every day, from choosing what to wear to planning what to have for dinner. Creativity doesn’t have to mean painting a picture or penning a poem, it can be as simple as combining two things to make something new and original. Actually, most of us are just out of practice at being creative. You may feel a bit rusty. However, if you are stuck in a rut and your life seems a little flat and uninspiring, you might like to give one of these simple creativity exercises a try to reignite your creativity and your brain.

Try some of these. You may be surprised!

- Wear clothes you have never worn together before
- Create something with technology – Try picking a favorite quote and adding a picture using photo editing software
- Do a finger painting or a Play Doh sculpture
- Take pictures of 10 unusual things you see today
- Stay up late and watch the stars
- Today ask someone what their favorite book is and why. Then read it.
- Get up just before dawn and go outside. The world looks and feels different as it’s waking up.
- Listen to a kind of music you don’t normally listen to.
- Take a bus or train journey somewhere new
- Spend ten minutes cloud watching
- Do something brave, such as stand-up comedy or bungee jumping
- Eat ice cream on a freezing day or hot soup when it is boiling outside
- Go to a restaurant and decide to try the third thing on the menu. Order and eat it whatever it is!
- Find 10 things to give away to people who would really love them
- Make a collage from scraps of paper, fabric and any other pretty bits and pieces you have around
- Go on a picnic or eat outside. Wrap up warm if it is snowing or just cold!
• Take a bath in the middle of the day
• Send a postcard from your hometown
• Eat with chopsticks or your fingers
• Set the table with the best china and glassware for an everyday dinner
• Sing in the shower
• Make something out of an old item of clothing. There are loads of ideas online, it could be anything from a cushion cover to a handbag
• Eat dessert before dinner (why not chocolate?)
• Write a letter or note to someone who made a difference in your life, but you never told them
• Go paddling or swimming in a lake, stream or the ocean
• Take a nap in the middle of the day
• Walk someone’s dog (with their permission of course ;))
• Go bird watching
• Try a yoga pose

WHAT'S YOUR IDEA?

I hope you enjoyed reading these creativity exercises and I also hope you have also planned to give one of them, or some other creative idea a try soon. You might be amazed at how much the simplest creativity exercises can boost your motivation, imagination and creative thinking. Don’t think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It’s self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can’t TRY to do things. You simply must DO things.

The idea I will try in the next week is…