

Neurobics: Keeping Your Brain Sharp Through Novelty

Summary

We often worry about our physical fitness, but "mental fitness" is just as vital. Your brain is capable of growing and changing throughout your life (neuroplasticity), but only if you challenge it. Doing the same routine every day puts your brain on autopilot. To keep your mind sharp, you need "neurobics"—engaging in novel, complex activities like learning a new skill, dancing, or simply taking a new route to work.

You've heard of aerobics for your heart, but have you heard of **neurobics** for your brain?

For a long time, scientists thought our brains stopped developing in our 20s. We now know that's wrong. Through a process called **neuroplasticity**, your brain can form new connections and grow new cells at any age. But there is a catch: it operates on a "use it or lose it" basis.

If you do the exact same things every day—same breakfast, same commute, same tasks—your brain goes into "autopilot mode." It becomes efficient, but it stops growing. To keep your cognitive edge, you have to embrace **novelty**.

Feed Your Brain Something New

The best brain games aren't necessarily Sudoku puzzles (though those are fine!); they are activities that force your brain to navigate something unfamiliar.

1. Switch Hands:

- **The Activity:** Try brushing your teeth or using your computer mouse with your non-dominant hand.
- **The Benefit:** This simple frustration forces neurons in your brain to fire in new patterns to control the unfamiliar movement.

2. Learn a "Complex" Skill:

- **The Activity:** Learning a new language, playing a musical instrument, or learning to dance.
- **The Benefit:** Dancing is a triple-threat: it requires physical coordination, memory (for the steps), and social interaction. It is one of the top activities linked to reduced dementia risk.

3. Break the Routine:

- **The Activity:** Take a different route to the grocery store. Rearrange the furniture in your office. Read a book in a genre you usually hate.
- **The Benefit:** New environments force your brain to pay attention rather than predicting what comes next.

Your brain loves a challenge. By injecting a little bit of "newness" into your week, you're building a cognitive reserve that will keep you sharp for years to come.

Sources Cited:

- Alzheimer's Society. (2024). *How to reduce your risk of dementia*.
- Cleveland Clinic. (n.d.). *Neuroplasticity: How to Rewire Your Brain*.
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