

Mental Health Minute

Neurobics and Your Brain

In this issue...

- * Neurobics and Your Brain
- * Financial Tips for Older Adults
- * Did you know...



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What are neurobics? Essentially brain exercises. The term was invented by Lawrence Katz and Manning Rubin to describe exercises that help the brain stay fit.

Some specific types of sensory stimuli and activities, **especially those that involve non-routine actions and thoughts**, produce more of those chemicals that encourage growth of new dendrites and neurons in the brain. These are generally non-routine activities. Routines become so automatic that actions are done largely unconsciously (ever get up in the morning and walk to the bathroom before you're really conscious?). Such automated or unconscious actions require less activity in the brain, and exercise it less.

A neurobic activity, on the other hand, should do one or more of the following:

1. Involve one or more of your senses in a new context.
2. Involve your full attention, at least briefly.
3. Break your routine in some significant way.

Neurobics do not need to be complicated, or require that you set aside special times. In fact, if they follow the guidelines above, many simple brain exercises can be worked into your normal day.

Examples Of Neurobics

- **Spend time in a new environment.** Go to a new park, or a new store. Travel, by the way, seems to slow age-related mental decline.
- **Smell new odors in the morning.** Have new odors, like a bottle of mint extract ready to smell first thing in the morning, to "wake up" your brain.
- **Take a shower with your eyes closed.** Your other senses become more active when you cannot see, and a shower engages several senses.
- **Try brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand.** This is difficult for some of us, and requires full attention the first time you try it.
- **Put on different clothes.** Ever notice how you feel differently when you wear different clothes? You may think differently as well.

Financial Tips for Older Adults

In this economy, we are all feeling the financial pinch. Frugality is a common theme among all of our lives today. "Making do" with what we have is becoming commonplace. Older adults have to deal with financial stress more than ever before. Unfortunately, financial worry can lead to health problems like depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, and high-blood pressure. Below are a few ideas you can pass along to an older adult or caregiver for helping with financial stress:

- Manage the stress through exercise, hobbies, and activities with friends and families. While these sorts of activities may be far from your mind, they can help to relieve stress and provide both physical and mental benefits.
- Share the stress by talking with others about your worries. This coping strategy helps shine a realistic light on our problems, may elicit helpful suggestions, and leaves us feeling that we are not alone. Older persons who are religious might wish to discuss their concerns with clergy or spiritual leaders. Places of worship and prayer can be a source of support and information.
- Don't get caught up in media reports about the national or global economy. Paying too much attention to the news about the economy is not always helpful and can be overwhelming.
- Evaluate your own financial situation and make those personal changes that you can to help reduce expenses. Get help if you need it from your family, religious institutions, local government, and utility companies, which may have assistance programs.



- If you need help with your medical bills, contact Medicare or Medicaid for advice. For information on how Medicare can help those with limited income afford their prescription drug costs, call **Social Security** at **1-800-772-1213** or visit www.socialsecurity.gov. Help with prescription drug costs is also offered by prescription drug assistance programs, some pharmaceutical companies, and retail vendors. For instance, learn about the Partnership for Prescription Assistance by calling toll-free 1-888-4PPA-NOW (1-888-477-2669) or visiting www.pparx.org.
- For some older individuals, this may be a stressful time due to the financial problems of adult children or grandchildren. Older adults may be asked to provide financial support to family members, and this can create additional hardships. If you are unable to provide financial help, consider giving advice or even recommending financial counseling to family members.
- Pay attention to your health. If you feel that worrying is affecting your health, sleep patterns, or contributing to any unhealthy habits like excessive drinking, seek the advice of a health care provider.
- Keep an eye on the older adults—family members, friends, neighbors—in your life and watch for any warning signs that financial stress has progressed to health problems needing medical attention. Warning signs include a loss of interest in social interactions and once-enjoyable activities, a pronounced change in dress or grooming habits, disorientation, or prolonged sadness.

Information from: Geriatric Mental Health Foundation

Did you know:

The population aged 85 and older is currently the fastest growing segment of the older adult population in the nation.

Mental Health Minute: enriching lives one step at a time

The information in this newsletter is intended to be general information and should not be constructed as medical advice or instruction. Readers should consult with their physician on any matter related to their individual health and well-being