

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO THRIVE FROM NINE TO FIVE

Age 42: The age our brain begins to power down.
What is in better shape: your brain or your body?

Our bodies are outliving our brains. We feel the aches and pains of physical losses, but what about indications of mental decline? Life expectancy in the United States is now about 80 years old. Girls born today have a one-in-three chance of living to 100, while boys have a one-in-four chance. Yet our cognitive brain performance peaks in our early 40s. That means mental functions like memory, speed of thinking, problem-solving, reasoning and decision-making deteriorate in our last 30 or 40 years of life.



Two prevailing myths impede our ability to reach our full brain potential.

Myth 1: Our inherent brain capacity is fixed. IQ, GPA and highest degree achieved largely predict our potential.

If you ask any employer, he or she will tell you highest GPA does not predict excellent job performance. Likewise, a low IQ score in the third grade cannot predict earning potential. Yet, we often accept these labels as truth and allow them to define and direct our highest brain potential. We should not let them limit us, nor can we rest on our laurels believing “once smart, always smart.” We must constantly engage our brain to keep it sharp.

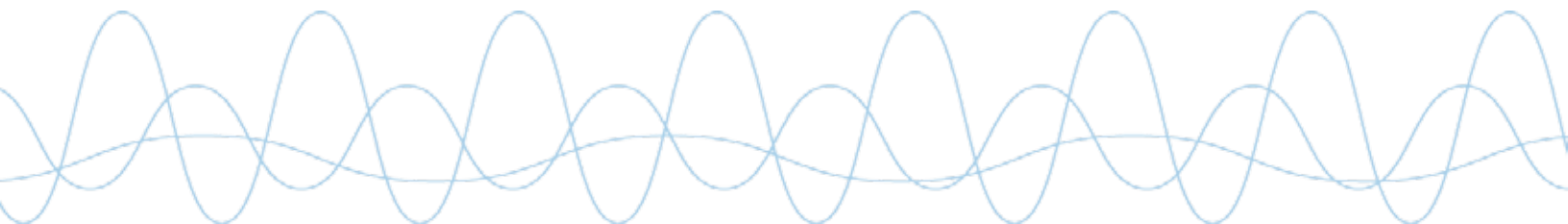
Myth 2: Cognitive decline is inevitable.

Until recently, cognitive decline in healthy adults was viewed as an inevitable consequence of aging, but we now know that it doesn't have to be that way. Science shows that our brain is at least as modifiable, if not more so, as any other part of our body. Taking advantage of a unique quality known as neuroplasticity, the brain's inherent ability to adapt and change throughout life, you can train your brain for health and productivity.

Harnessing the power of our frontal lobe – the part of our brain responsible for planning, reasoning, novel thinking, decision-making, judgment and managing emotions – will increase creativity, energy and focus as well as support mental independence throughout our lifespan.

Just as we've come to realize that we can improve our physical health through diet and workouts, so too can we improve our cognitive health. It's a matter of committing to adopt healthy brain habits, eliminating toxic mental routines and engaging in the right mental exercises.

The truth is our brain adapts from moment to moment, depending on how we use it; it either declines or improves. The direction our brain health goes depends on us and the way we challenge it – at home, work, and play.



At the Root of Workplace Brain Drain

In a healthy brain, cognitive decline occurs because we let it. Science is now showing that unhealthy habits and workplace culture are key culprits for unnecessary cognitive decline. These common workplace-driven happenings are definite brain-drainers.

Cubicle chaos

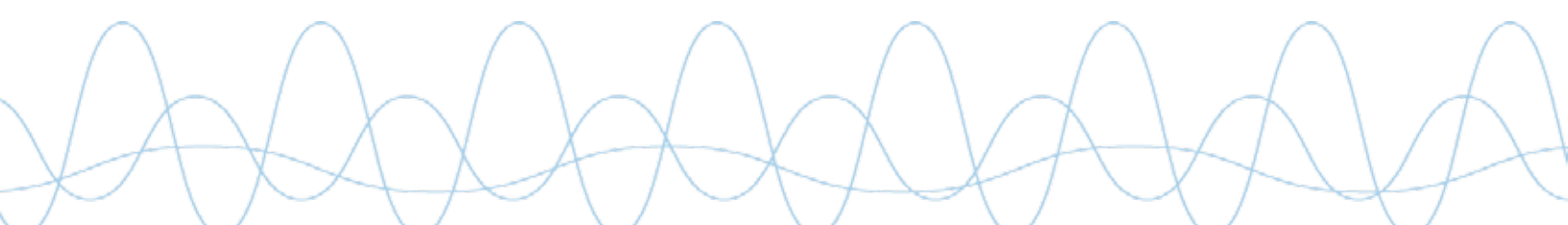
Office designers envisioned cubicles as field-leveling, productivity-boosting, creativity-enhancing workspaces fit for dynamic idea generation. Instead, cubicles sabotaged the quiet peace of individual work environments, preventing focus and thus zapping productivity and efficiency.

Unfocused meetings and unproductive conference calls

Too many meetings and lengthy conference calls take place without clear goals and focused agendas. The time drain derails an individual's workflow that would be better spent accomplishing actionable items that advance strategic objectives and long-term goals.

Too many people

Gathering everyone's opinion on a project can trick us into believing that we are building a consensus, but in reality the true problem is not being solved and the time wasted is unnerving. To expedite the process and reduce stress, only include the most relevant team members who are best equipped to evaluate the situation and contribute to the final decision. You will save brainpower and cut economic costs when you ask yourself: "Who is 'really' present and engaged?"



How Your Habits Affect Your Workplace Productivity and Personal Brain Health

It's not just our work environment that drains our brains. Because the path our brains take can be good or bad, our personal habits must be overhauled as well to boost brain health.

Multitaskaholic

Multitasking is like asbestos to the brain. Our brain is not wired to do more than one task at a time. When you believe you are multitasking, your brain is actually switching quickly from one task to another. Multitasking causes brain fatigue and reduces productivity and accuracy. It also causes a build-up of the stress hormone cortisol. Long-term increases in cortisol can lead to:

- Worsened memory
- Increased brain cell death
- Decreased neuronal activity
- Weakened immune system
- Poorer cognitive functioning
- Greater brain atrophy

Tethered to technology

The need to respond instantly to every email, phone call, text or social media post as quickly as possible is rewiring our brain to be addicted to distraction. We literally crave the next ping, making it virtually impossible to go for any stretch without checking our technology. In this ADHD-like state, we struggle to focus for long periods of time and think deeply about one thought, idea or task.

Information overload

Research shows that higher-performing minds are not more efficient at knowing what to pay attention to, but rather, what to block out. Our brain is exposed to an unrelenting stream of information via various sources of technology and media as well as an overabundance of input from family and social responsibilities. This constant state of information overload degrades the brain's natural ability to block out irrelevant information, decreasing efficiency and performance.

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Overly focused on memorization

A brain too occupied with remembering every detail, name, date or statistic is less likely to work efficiently. Focusing on a perfect memory depletes limited brain resources better used for functions that promote independence throughout life, such as problem-solving, decision-making and critical reasoning. In some ways, "forgetting" is good, and if you're worried, write down critical information that you want to and should remember.

Cruising on automatic pilot

Life moves fast, and we often compensate by falling into routines, sticking to the path of least resistance and letting our thoughts, conversations and activities become stagnant. Rote memorization and regurgitation of information at the lowest level fails to challenge our brain to do what it loves best: innovate. Allowing your brain to function at this low level weakens the cerebral connections. Your brain is changing, but in an unwanted negative direction.

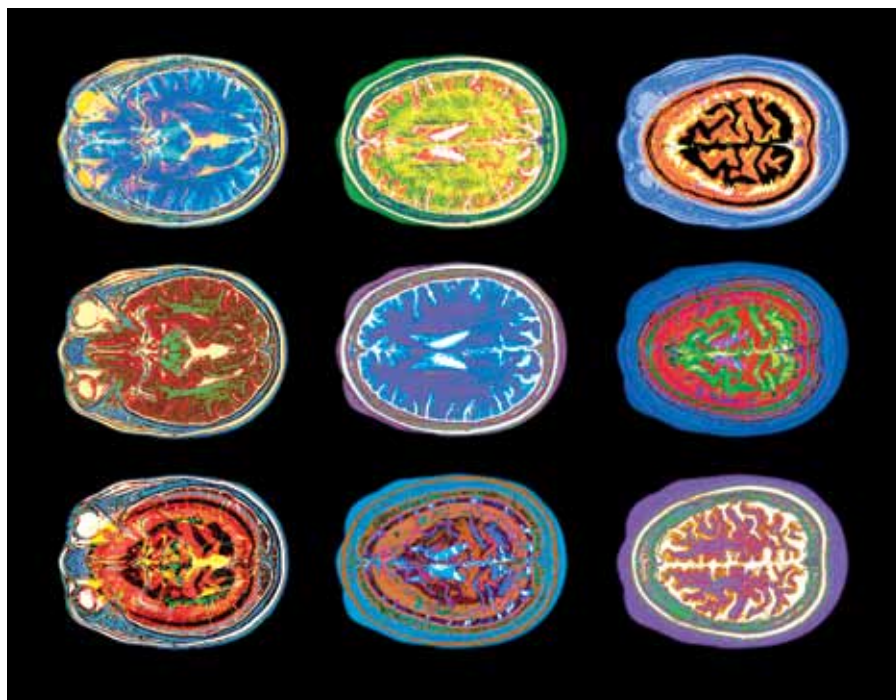
Constant mental work

Just like unrelenting and constant physical exercise causes overexertion and bodily injury, constant mental work is harmful to the brain. Not giving the brain the downtime it needs depletes its overall health, productivity and ability to innovate.

Consequences of Brain Burnout

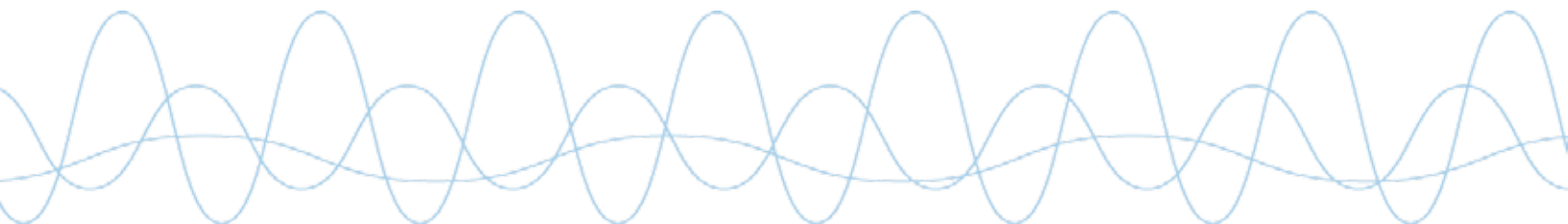
Unhealthy habits have dire consequences for long-term brain health, function and cognitive performance. But the repercussions of brain burnout also extend past the detrimental effects to our personal health and quality of life. Failing to maximize our cognitive performance carries a high personal and professional economic burden as well.

I coined the term “brainomics” in an attempt to capture the connection between cognitive potential and economic performance. A healthy brain can make you richer, both emotionally and financially. Most people, however, don’t consider their brain health until they’re faced with injury, disease or advancing age.



In the workplace, failing to be a good steward of brain potential foretells decreased productivity, more sick days, stunted advances in innovation and shortened career spans. The personal toll leads to a premature decline in cognitive functioning, greater brain atrophy and the missed opportunity for a life made infinitely more fulfilling and exciting by a vibrant, creative and resourceful mind.

The good news is that, according to brainomics theory, incremental increases in brainpower have an exponential impact on your bottom line.



Your Brain: Ages and Stages

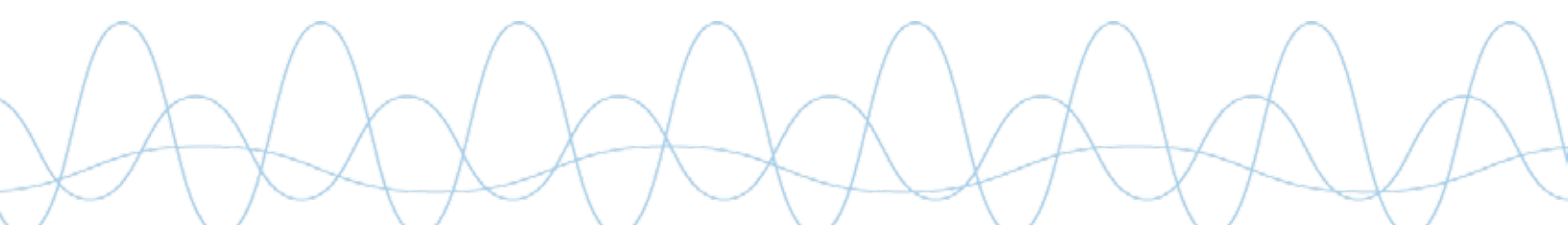
Just like physical health, investing in your brain health as early and as long as possible will increase your ability to build resilience and regenerate cognitive losses. Each life stage presents rich potential and areas of vulnerability ripe for improvement.

Ensuring optimum brain performance at every stage of life requires understanding the basic needs of each one. Given the unique aspects of our current culture, the following describes your brain for the age range you're in.

Finders: 25-35 years old – You are addicted to and an expert at “finding” information. You are part of the point-and-click generation and excel at taking care of routines. While you are primed to develop your brain function and expand your innovative potential, your challenge is overcoming the need to always find the “right” answer. Depart from recycling information and instead combine separate ideas in innovative ways to give them your own spin.

Seekers: 36-45 years old – You are between a rock and a hard place in life. The corporate ladder climb now takes longer than it did for the generation that preceded you. As you “seek” to demonstrate your value-add and search for your place to lead and make a difference, your challenge is prioritizing to avoid brain burnout while achieving your growth potential.

Thinkers: 46-55 years old – You are independent, optimistic, confident and hard working. Your challenge is to avoid slipping into brain autopilot and instead continue to take on new challenges and adopt new technology.



Take Your Brain Back to Health

Our work at the Center for BrainHealth at The University of Texas at Dallas is dedicated to improving brain performance in individuals of all ages and stages.

Our research has shown that making our brains stronger, healthier and more productive – at home and in the office – requires changing the way we use them every day. Our scientific team has developed and proven a brain training program called Strategic Memory Advanced Reasoning Training (SMART).



SMART employs nine strategies to boost neuroplasticity, our brain's inherent ability to be rewired and retrained across the lifespan. The strategies are defined by three core thinking capacities that work together to produce benefits to overall cognitive integrity.

Strategic Attention:

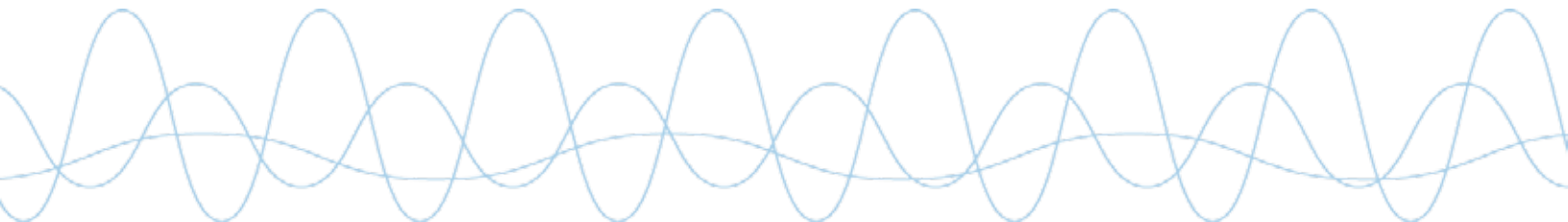
Our ability to block out and filter irrelevant details and distraction to focus on the most important information.

Integrated Reasoning:

Our ability to synthesize ideas, which means taking in facts, filtering them and combining them with existing knowledge to transform them into broad concepts.

Innovative Thinking:

Our ability to generate and exploit new ideas to solve problems; to seek, devise and employ improved ways of dealing with unknown and unfamiliar contexts; or to create something that is original and valuable.



Here are five scientifically proven tips we have discovered to make your brain smarter.

Brainpower of None

Give your brain necessary downtime. Your brain can reboot after a few minutes of rest. Quieting your mind helps improve decision-making, problem-solving and productivity.

Practice the Brainpower of None. Make brain downtime a priority by using the 5x5 principle: step away and disengage for five minutes at least five times a day to free your mind for your next "aha" moment.

Brainpower of One

Stop multitasking. On average, we work for three minutes with laser focus. Once interrupted it takes an average of 20 minutes to return to the original task. A task that would normally take 25 minutes to complete without interruption takes more than two hours when multitasking or allowing disruptions.

Practice the Brainpower of One. Perform tasks sequentially for optimum brain performance, productivity and accuracy. When working on a task of substance, give it your full attention. Turn off phone and email alerts and find a quiet place to complete the task at hand.

Brainpower of Two

Organizing your to-do list strategically will boost your productivity, quality of work and efficiency. As T. Boone Pickens says, "When you are hunting elephants, don't get distracted chasing rabbits."

Practice the Brainpower of Two. Prioritize! Identify the two most critical items on your to-do list each day. Dedicate uninterrupted, prime brain time to accomplishing them before moving on to less significant items on the list.

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Brainpower of Deep and Wide

Rise above rote thinking. Synthesized thinking takes advantage of rich repertoires of knowledge, experience and expertise. It also strengthens the connections between different areas of your brain. Your brain is quickly jaded by routine, because it was built to dynamically shift between details and the big picture. It hates information downloading.

Practice the Brainpower of Deep and Wide. Translate your world by thinking like a reporter and working your brain to construct provocative thought-filled ideas. When taking in large amounts of information, try to explain it in a few sentences. Kick off meetings with provocative big ideas. Encourage individuals to synthesize and succinctly articulate one or two ideas. Power your important email messages with simple but thought-evoking subject lines.

Brainpower of Innovative Thinking

Say no to status quo. Our brain was wired to be inspired. It thrives when facing new challenges. Everyone has the potential to break new ground and be more inventive at any age. Brain plasticity studies indicate that declining brain capacity can be positively altered in the healthy brain by exercising innovative thinking.

Practice the Brainpower of Innovation. Instead of doing things the same way, constantly strive to ratchet up and revitalize your thoughts and behaviors in the spirit of novelty. After your next meeting, take time to reflect and reevaluate the party line to envision a unique outcome. Ask yourself questions such as "What were the three take-home messages? How can we respond differently to an issue discussed? What are the next best steps to follow up?"

Brainpower Boosters

Although complex thinking is the most critical and robust way to create and maintain a positive brain health trajectory, your mind cannot thrive on thoughts alone. Build a solid foundation for your cognitive well-being with the following pro-brain choices.

Eat

What's good for the heart is good for the head. A Mediterranean diet – more olive oil, vegetables, fruit and fish – is generally the best diet for brain health.

Sleep

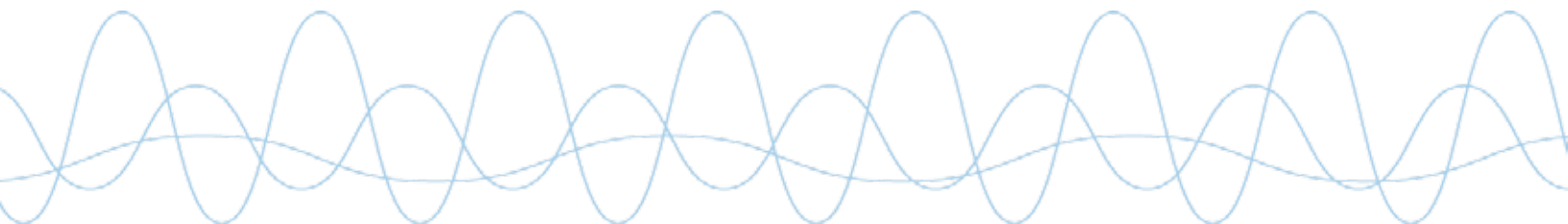
Get 7-8 hours per night. Sleep is one of the best remedies for improving brain health. A good night's sleep cleans out toxins in your brain, lets your brain process information and emotions from the day before and sets the stage for a mentally productive day. Your brain makes neural connections as you sleep.

Move your feet

Exercise for at least one hour a day, three times per week. Recently published research shows that aerobic exercise stimulates positive brain change and memory gains more quickly than previously thought possible. Adding regular aerobic exercise that elevates your heart rate will increase blood flow to key memory centers in the brain and improve fact retention. When you combine complex thinking with aerobic exercise, brain health benefits are amplified.

Make and maintain friendships

Establishing important social ties is a key aspect to remaining mentally vibrant. Your mind hates status quo, so having relationships that build on your current interests or encourage you to discover new things are very beneficial to keeping your brain moving forward. Finding like-minded friends can help you explore interests for which you share a passion. Friends who have different interests and opinions are also great brain boosters. They will continually challenge you to attain new perspectives and get out of routine thinking and behavior.

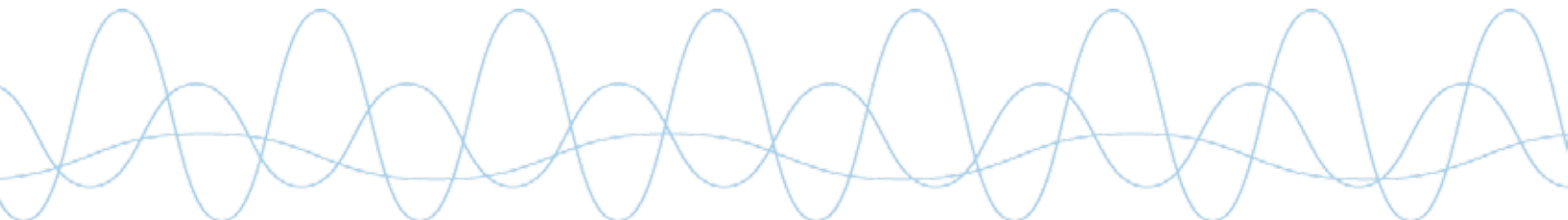


Thrive from Nine to Five Starting Today

All too often, we start our day mentally overwhelmed and exhausted. We sigh, pondering how in the world we can possibly make a dent in our out-of-control to-do list while also juggling other life commitments. A brain already zapped of energy is not the best way to start the day. It is not just about reframing your day with a positive attitude; the reality is you do have more to accomplish in a single day than is humanly possible.

To thrive from 9 to 5, you may need to drastically change the way you engage your brain. Use these guidelines to embrace and venture into your day's opportunities with renewed mental vigor.

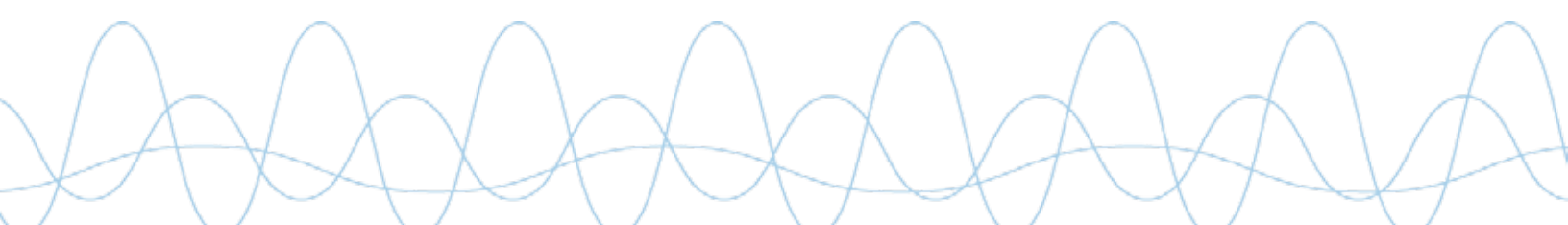
- The night before, identify one or two of the most pivotal tasks/responsibilities you face the next day. These are tasks that will require deeper thinking to achieve and will advance your longer-term goals/vision.
- Sleep on these priorities without effort. By priming the "brain pump" the night before, you are likely to have unanticipated, new, and productive ideas. Our brain is always working for us especially during sleep when our rhythms slow down. Your brain consolidates your previous ideas into flashes of new insights that can jump-start your big goals for the day.
- In the morning when you're getting ready, purposefully keep your environment quiet except for meaningful conversation with those around you. Do not turn on radios or the TV. Try driving to work without making calls or listening to music. Your brain will be primed to tackle your big, weighty responsibilities (or "elephants") immediately.
- When you get to the office, update your to-do list and start on your two "elephants." Carve out prime brain time and stick to these top one or two priorities until you make progress.
- Take on substantial tasks one at a time without allowing interruptions. Turn off email alerts, silence your phone and shut your door (if you have one to close). Start with 15-minute intervals and work your way up from there. You will achieve more in 20 to 30 minutes uninterrupted than you will in over two hours when constantly interrupted.
- Give yourself a brief brain break regularly. When working on mentally challenging activities for more than 25 minutes at a time, take a five-minute break. Your brain quickly resets and recovers from fatigue when you step back. As an added bonus, new visions are likely to arise regarding your task.
- Reenergize your day at lunch with innovative conversation or quiet time away from the mental grind.
- Once your "elephants" are well fed for the time being, you should recognize renewed freedom and brain energy. You will be able to check off the easier, less demanding items on your to-do list in record time.
- Recharge the brainpower of your team. Brains are wired and inspired to engage in innovative thinking and acting. Identify at least one or two routines that you need to revamp with innovative new ideas. Have a 15-minute flash meeting to garner ideas of change.
- Near the end of the day, strategically view your day's achievements, embrace the progress you have made and synthesize two or three big ideas that you want to motivate and fuel for the next day's activities.



Your brain is the most intricate machine, capable of immense positive change throughout life. Do not be passive about your brain's health. Choose to dynamically engage your brain to the highest level every day on a few tasks and free it up to replenish its efficiency and power. Use your mental resources wisely. Challenge your mind to think outside of its comfort zone, and calm your mind to be a strategic responder on a regular basis.

Adopting a healthy-brain lifestyle will not only boost your professional productivity but also help you thrive in and out of the office. You would not go through life sitting on the couch or running a marathon every day and still expect to remain in perfect physical health. Nor can you expect your brain to remain in prime condition if you leave it on autopilot, exempt from new challenges, or keep it constantly exhausted with nonstop work.

Make a commitment to change your brain habits today and every day.
As you do, you will ensure that your best brain years are ahead of you –
not behind you.



Work Smarter with Citrix

Working efficiently is the key to working smarter, and fortunately, there are tools to help you get more done each day, no matter the circumstances. Citrix GoToMeeting, GoToWebinar, GoToAssist and GoToMyPC connect you to the people, programs and information you need to get your job done from anywhere.

"Citrix is the Swiss-army knife of software. We go to one place and everything snaps together. It's all designed with face-to-face communication in mind."

Larry Lark
School Director
National Training, Inc.

"We've enjoyed rapid growth in the past several years, and although there are a number of reasons, GoToMeeting and GoToWebinar have certainly had a substantive impact. They connect our dispersed organization, bring us closer to clients, accelerate the sales cycle and support our business model."

Jacques Bazinet
Vice President of Corporate Development
InsideOut Development

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Jack Elder
Founder and CEO
I/DC Technologies LLC



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