

Keep Your Wits About You

Exercise your mind.

How's your mental stamina?

Do you often lose concentration at work or during conversations? Want to reduce brain fog to improve thinking and learning? Faced with information overload and hectic schedules, many people find their focus drifting away from the task at hand.

You can train your brain to process and recall information more effectively. **Practice using these everyday brain aids:**

Reduce distractions. Identify one task to focus on and when possible ignore everything else, including your phone, email and interruptions. Tackle complex assignments when you're most alert.

Keep your mind sharp. Enjoy challenging puzzles daily. Develop hobbies or study new subjects so you're always learning something different. At work, maybe explore advanced training opportunities.

Nurture healthy relationships. Regular interaction with others may provide the best kind of brain exercise.



Just as your body needs exercise to stay physically fit, your brain needs focused activity to stay mentally fit.

Routinely relieve mental tension. Studies have linked chronic stress to memory loss.

Choose a brain-boosting diet. That includes fish and other lean protein foods, plus plenty of fruit and vegetables every day. Skip alcohol and avoid saturated fats; steady consumption may raise your risk of dementia and impair concentration and memory.

Get seven to nine hours of sleep daily. Sleep deprivation compromises your memory, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking skills.

Choose blood-pumping cardio exercise. What's good for the heart is good for the brain. Exercise breaks can help you get past mental fatigue and afternoon slumps.

Fall for These Autumn Favorites

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

September is Fruits & Veggies — More Matters Month.



Autumn is the perfect time to bite into a fresh-picked pear or savor a new type of squash. Here are our top favorite crops to try this season:

• **Pears:** Whether you favor Bosc, Bartlett or Anjou, a ripe pear is delicious in salads (pair it with goat cheese), added to soup, or poached for dessert. Pears are ripe when the neck gently yields to pressure from your thumb.



• **Squash:** From pumpkin to acorn squash, autumn isn't complete until you've enjoyed seasonal squash and their boost of vitamin A. Don't forget to bake the delicious squash seeds for a crunchy snack.



• **Carrots:** These bright orange staples are hardy and sweet. They're in peak season in the fall, and they store well for months. Eat them raw as snacks, bake them into carrot muffins, add to stir-fries and shred into spaghetti sauce.



• **Cranberries:** Scarlet red, tart and succulent, cranberries are high in antioxidants including vitamin C. Add these fresh, bright jewels to oatmeal, fruit salad, smoothies and seasonal compotes and relishes.



• **Brussels sprouts:** If you don't love Brussels sprouts, it means you're not making them right. Slice them in half, combine with olive oil, balsamic vinegar and maple syrup, and roast cut-side down at 425°F for 25 minutes.



• **Beets:** Boiled or roasted, beets are delicious, but did you know you can also eat them raw? Shred or thinly slice raw beets for salads, sandwiches and wraps to add a sweet, earthy crunch. Look for beautiful candy cane beets, which have red and white stripes.



September is
Cholesterol
Education
Month.



Act Now: Healthy Cholesterol

Your cardiovascular health is dependent on strong, healthy blood cholesterol levels. Since high LDL (bad) cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol have no symptoms, you won't know if your level is unhealthy without having it checked. A blood test is the only way to detect it.

Depending on risk factors you may have for abnormal cholesterol, get tested every four to six years after age 20, unless your health care provider tells you otherwise.

In the meantime, there's a lot you can do, too. Along with a more nutritious diet and weight loss, staying physically active may help reverse unhealthy cholesterol. Exactly how exercise helps improve cholesterol levels is unclear.

Studies suggest regular physical activity:

- Lowers triglycerides (a type of blood fat).
- Increases HDL, the good cholesterol.
- May not have much impact on LDL, the bad cholesterol, unless you combine it with dietary changes and weight loss. If you have risk factors listed above, check with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.

The type of exercise needed to lower cholesterol? The American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend that people do repetitive aerobic (cardio) exercise most days of the week using multiple muscle groups. Examples include cycling, swimming, walking, elliptical machines and step machines.

Weekly exercise goal: Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity (e.g., brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (e.g., jogging) throughout your week.

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

September is National Childhood Obesity Month.

Childhood Obesity

About one in five school-age children is obese, increasing their eventual risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and osteoarthritis.

The CDC and NIH urge parents to learn about preventing childhood obesity and how to help already overweight kids slow down their weight gain. Children who are overweight should not be put on restrictive diets. Instead, work with your child's pediatrician or a dietitian on a healthy nutrition and exercise plan, and get the whole family on board with healthy habits.

It's important for parents to set a good example. Practice regular physical activity and healthy eating. Cut back on fast food and serve family meals and snacks with lots of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and protein. Emphasize drinking water instead of sugary drinks and limit high-calorie juices.

Encourage children to play sports, walk a dog, and do other physical activities for at least 60 minutes spread throughout a day. Make sure your child gets at least eight hours of sleep every night, too. Insufficient sleep raises the risk of obesity later in life.

Learn more at [cdc.gov/healthyweight/children/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/children/index.html).



Q: What is herd immunity?

A: **Herd immunity, or community immunity,** refers to the number of people in a group with immunity to an infection. If a large number of people within a group are immune to a virus, those still susceptible are less likely to get infected. Why? The virus has difficulty spreading among a large group of people already immune to it.

Herd immunity protects vulnerable people.

The spread of disease slows down when most people do not get or transmit the infection. This helps protect people who are not immune, or who are susceptible to complications. Seniors, pregnant women and people with chronic conditions or weakened immune systems are more susceptible to infections.

Vaccination improves herd immunity. It allows large numbers of people to develop immunity safely and quickly. Vaccines remove the need to contract serious illnesses, such as polio and measles, to become immune. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **3 Common Fitness Questions**, is at [personalbest.com/extras/20V9tools](https://www.personalbest.com/extras/20V9tools).

