

**Opinion**

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## Brain Power by Brigitte Mars



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### Opinion

Brains will sprout new connections between cells as long as the environment challenges or stimulates. The saying, "Use it or you lose it" applies to brain power as well as other aspects of our lives. Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers the brain uses to communicate. Transmission of signals across the synapses is regulated by some thirty brain chemicals. The best known are acetylcholine, epinephrine and serotonin, all made from amino acids. In Asian Medicine the brain is referred to as the "seat of marrow" and nourished by the Kidney System.

Brains rely on a constant stream of nutrients, blood sugar and oxygen to produce energy that facilitates learning, thoughts and actions. Though the brain makes up about two percent total body weight, it requires about twenty percent of the body's total oxygen intake. Breathe more deeply. High chlorophyll foods are excellent oxygen transporters. These include leafy greens such as kale, collards and beet greens and super foods like wheat grass and barley grass juice. When wanting to feel mentally clear, high protein foods are excellent. Fish is high in DMAE (Dimethylaminoethanol), often referred to as a "smart nutrient" which stimulates acetylcholine production and relieves muddled thinking. Other brain foods include the antioxidant rich blueberries, cauliflower, coconuts, and walnuts. Hemp seeds are a vegan source of omega 3's and very brain beneficial. We also know that many of the brain's neurotransmitters are made in the gut, so healthy digestion and diet are imperative to brain and memory health.

Carbohydrates such as potatoes, pasta, rice and bread may contribute to serenity rather than sharpness. High cholesterol levels may eventually clog arteries, thereby decreasing brain blood supply. Both fat and free radicals combine in the bloodstream to produce a waste product called lipofuscin which can adversely affect brain function. Food allergies, yeast overgrowth, addiction and nutritional deficiencies can all contribute to intelligence impairment and should be corrected. The medium chain fatty

acids in coconut oil nourish nerve cells and are being researched for its ability to improve Alzheimer's and dementia due to the production of ketones from the saturated fats to fuel brain cells. Remember that black foods like chia, black ice, black beans, black olives and black quinoa provide many brain nourishing minerals. Exposure to heavy metals, aluminum cookware (and pipes!), house cleaning products, pesticides, paints, some art and cosmetic supplies can adversely affect the brain.

Several herbs can improve mental capacity. Gotu Kola (*Centella asiatica*) is used in India as a cerebral tonic. Containing calcium, pangamic acid, phosphorus and the amino acid glutamine, Gotu kola has been used to treat amnesia, dementia, fatigue and senility. It has a revitalizing effect on the brain cells and nerves. Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) helps improve the brain's ability to utilize oxygen and glucose by improving peripheral blood flow. Ginkgo improves nerve transmission, activates ATP (Adenosine triphosphate), an organic compound that aids metabolic reactions. Ginkgo is one of the most prescribed herbs in Europe and recommended in treating dementia, memory loss, and senility and promoting recovery from stroke. It is an antioxidant and cerebral tonic.

Bacopa (*Bacopa monnieri*) is used in Ayurvedic medicine as a nourishing brain, nerve and kidney tonic. It enhances neurotransmitter function. Eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) nourishes the pituitary and adrenal glands. Studies done in Russia show it helps improve job accuracy. Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) was used by ancient Greek scholars, who wore laurels of rosemary when taking examinations to improve memory. Rosemary stimulates the pineal gland and improves energy levels. Rosemary contains more than a dozen antioxidants. It is a nervine, rejuvenative, stimulant and tonic.

Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) is sweet and energizing and helps stabilize blood sugar levels. It has been used to treat debility, emotional instability, Parkinson's Disease and stress. It is a tonic,

nutritive and rejuvenative. Oatstraw (*Avena sativa*) is a cerebral and nerve tonic, nutritive and rejuvenative. Schizandra berries (*Schisandra chinensis*) are a cerebral tonic that improve the body's ability to utilize oxygen. In China many people chew a few berries daily to improve concentration and coordination. Lion's Mane mushroom helps nerve regeneration.

Aromas for mental alertness include lemon, lemon grass, lime, peppermint and rosemary. They can be used in a diffuser which disperses aroma into the room, inhaled from a tissue or used in an inhaler. It is ideal to smell the aroma when studying and then again when taking a test or having to perform.

The following techniques can improve mental ability.

- 1) Travel new routes (driving or walking) to inspire different thoughts.
- 2) Avoid being stuck in a rut. Visit new restaurants and experience the flavors of various cultures. Vary the places you vacation.
- 3) Socialize with intelligent people. Have in depth discussions.
- 4) Ask questions and get answers, even if you have to look them up yourself.
- 5) Sharpen your senses by noticing as many details as possible.
- 6) Absentmindedness means the mind was not present on the matters at hand. "Be Here Now," truly is good advice.
- 7) "I hear, and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Learn experientially when possible.
- 8) Good posture allows energy to better move through the nervous system.
- 9) Exercise increases the body's intake of oxygen and speeds up nerve impulses between brain cells. Work up a sweat three times a week.
- 10) Read challenging things.
- 11) Use your nondominant hand for several minutes daily for simple tasks to stimulate different neural pathways.
- 12) Color therapists say yellow is cerebrally stimulating. Highlight important passages you read in yellow. Wear yellow. Use yellow decor in places where mental work is done.
- 13) Observe Nature.
- 14) Write down details - phone numbers, things to do and goals. Getting things out of your mind and onto paper helps free

you for more creative endeavors. Keep an engagement calendar. Record flashes of brilliance and words of wisdom!

- 15) When taking classes, sit in different places to gain different perspectives.
- 16) When attending lectures, take notes on key words and phrases.
- 17) When wanting to remember something, repeat it aloud to yourself. Visualize it being imprinted upon your brain.
- 18) To remember names, associate the name with a picture. Visualize Bob turning into a bobcat. Right after being introduced to someone, use their name. "It's nice to meet you, Denise." If you don't quite catch how to say their name, ask how to spell it.
- 19) When learning something important, with your mind's eye, see yourself registering the information and filing it. Then practice retrieving it and refilling it.
- 20) Think positively. You'll do better if you affirm "I can pass this exam" rather than "I'll never make it."
- 21) Do your best to avoid emotional stress.
- 22) Avoid damaging substances such as cigarettes, alcohol, pollutants, and MSG. Some medications adversely affect the brain.
- 23) Studying before bed is said to be most effective.
- 24) Work in teams. Draw on the skills and ideas of your friends and co-workers. Brainstorming where you record wild thoughts and ideas often leads to fruitful concepts.
- 25) Break negative thoughts with diversion. Go for a walk. Call a friend. Go to a film.
- 26) Creative people usually retain a childlike quality. Play!
- 27) Visualization practices mental gymnastics. Einstein supposedly came upon the Theory of Relativity while visualizing flying along at the speed of light.
- 28) Play mentally challenging games like Suduko, Chess or Scrabble.
- 29) Exercises to improve memory are called mnemonics where one makes up interesting information to help remember something. To remember the planets in their order of distance from the sun - Mary's Violet Eyes Make John Stay Up Nights. Period!
- 30) Learn things of value for your entire life. Keep an open heart and mind. Be open to the possibilities.....



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