

EXERCISE AND GOOD NUTRITION ARE ESSENTIAL FOR KEEPING YOUR GREY MATTER IN GREAT SHAPE, SAY BRAIN EXPERTS

GOOD FATS ARE VERY BENEFICIAL FOR BRAIN HEALTH.

STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY BRAIN

ENJOY BRAIN-BODY BENEFITS

Both aerobic and non-aerobic exercise have been shown to improve brain health, specifically the memory area and the hypothalamus, says leading neurosurgeon, Dr Charlie Teo. "The hypothalamus controls all autonomic (involuntary) functions, so the gastrointestinal system, cardiovascular system and hormonal mechanisms all benefit from exercise," he says. "The recommendation is 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise a week. Ideally, 30 minutes a day; don't sit for prolonged periods of time and adopt a healthy lifestyle, such as walking to work or always using the stairs rather than the lift."

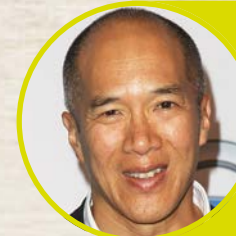
BOOST THE FEEL-GOOD HORMONES

There is compelling evidence that exercise improves mental health, says Charlie. "Stress, anxiety and depression are reduced through the production of mood-enhancing agents such as endorphins and enkephalins," he explains. "And, exercise-induced hypothalamic activity in turn induces an increase in the production of feel-good hormones."

AVOID JUNK FOOD

Diets that are higher in 'discretionary' foods, such as soft drink, chips, ice-cream, hamburgers and fried chicken, are associated with an increased risk of depression, says Professor Felice Jacka, director of the Food

& Mood Centre and author of the new book *Brain Changer*. "In Australia more than a third of people's energy intake, on average, comes from these types of food," she says. "In 2017, two studies showed that if you took people with clinical depression and helped them make improvements to their diet, it substantially reduced their depressive symptoms. In fact, many people went on to have full remission of their depression using this strategy."



SWIM FOR A CAUSE

Charlie will join swimmers stripping off for the Sydney Skinny Ocean Swim on March 17, to raise funds for the Charlie Teo Foundation, which funds brain cancer research. For more details or to donate, visit thesydneyskinny.com.au.

FEED YOUR GUT ZOO

All the foods we know are good for our physical health are also good for our mental and brain health, advises Felice. "A diet high in plant foods, such as fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, wholegrain cereals and legumes will provide the wide range of nutrients critical to the healthy functioning of our body and brain," she explains. "The fibre in these foods feeds the gut bugs on which we depend. Similarly, the sorts of fats found in fish, olive oil, nuts and seeds, and avocados help support the health of our brain and gut," says Felice. "And anything that is good for the gut is good for the rest of you! Diversity is key here – the more diverse your diet, the more diverse your gut 'zoo', and science suggests that this is important for health."

DIMINISH YOUR DEMENTIA RISK

There are many different causes of dementia, Alzheimer's being only one, explains Charlie. "Another relatively common cause is due to poor blood supply to the brain and multiple small strokes," he explains. "Exercise and stronger cardiac function improves the blood flow to the

brain and reduces the risk of multi-infarct dementia."

Research has strongly linked physical health and lifestyle behaviours to dementia risk, adds Felice. "Raised blood sugar (even in the 'high-normal' range), type 2 diabetes, obesity, high insulin and insulin resistance, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol are all risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline," she explains. "These are closely linked to our diets and the physical activity we do, or don't do! On the other hand, Mediterranean-style diets are linked to a reduced risk for dementia, explains Felice. "If you want to age well, think carefully about what (and how much) you put on your plate."

Brain Changer

The latest cutting-edge science on how diet can affect your risk of anxiety and depression, and influence the health of your brain

PROFESSOR FELICE JACKA
Australian and international authority on diet and mental and brain health

Brain Changer by Professor Felice Jacka (Macmillan Australia, \$34.99) is available from good bookshops.

Text: Sue Ramsey. Always consult your GP before making changes to your health routine.

