

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

More Brain-strengthening Ideas

If you think you might be overreactive to stress-related events, strengthening your own brain can help you recover. Benefits gained from strengthening one's brain include:

- Strengthens the blood-brain barrier, which keeps harmful substances (such as inflammatory agents and toxins) from reaching the brain
- Influences telomeres and epigenomes to favorably affect cell replication and gene expression
- Clear out harmful proteins, such as amyloid plaques found in Alzheimer's disease

An essential pathway to strengthening the brain involves reducing or eliminating health conditions and habits that may adversely affect the brain. Here are a few to consider:

Sleep apnea. When untreated, sleep apnea raises the risk for depression, dementia, inflammation, reduced brain volume, and the build-up of amyloid plaque in areas responsible for memory.

High cholesterol. It can cause depression and even reduce blood flow. Some medications that lower cholesterol levels also help reduce inflammation, making them doubly beneficial.

Gum disease. Is linked to mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. This is probably because bacteria from the gums reach the brain and cause inflammation.

Thyroid disorders. Thyroid dysfunction can lead to anxiety, depression, mental sluggishness, sleep problems, worsening of PTSD, elevated cholesterol, weight gain, and many other symptoms. More than one in eight adults will develop a thyroid disorder.

High blood pressure. Exercise, taking probiotics, limiting processed foods, and increasing intake of fruits, vegetables, and fermented foods—along with taking needed medication—can help lower blood pressure.

Neurotoxic and neuroinflammatory agents. Excessive intake of certain substances can cause abnormalities in brain function before structural damage is apparent. These harmful effects may result from excessive use of illicit drugs, but other products can also lead to *difficulties*.

- Drinking six or more cups of coffee daily may increase the risk of reduced brain volume, dementia, and strokes. Think about a two-cup per day limit, researchers recommend.
- But what about those caffeinated energy drinks? Research indicates they are linked to increased fatigue, depression, and sleep problems. Try getting enough quality sleep every night instead.
- Canadian researchers have found that alcohol abstainers have better mental health than drinkers. They also found that resilience factors and alcohol intake are inversely correlated. Moderate amounts of alcohol are linked to brain shrinkage and heavy drinking to greater risk for dementia. Think about how to reduce your intake of alcohol and especially how to avoid binge drinking.

For more tips on reducing health difficulties that impact mood, emotional capacity, and trauma recovery, check out the attached longer version of this article. Check out all the resources archived at WellnessMN.org.