



Buzz, Body & Bites

A newsletter for actively aging adults

Virginia Cooperative Extension Family & Consumer Sciences

July 2024

Intellectual Wellness, Neuroplasticity, and Connection

Curiosity is the fan that fuels brain health and intellectual wellness. Aging naturally offers less opportunity than in youth to experience new things without intentionally deciding to do so, and sets the stage for less curiosity and increased complacency. Continuing to pursue ways to challenge your brain and build your intellectual muscles will help maintain your intellectual wellness. One's intellectual wellness is directly tied to health in other areas of your life, including physical and social wellness.

To understand the physical benefits of intellectual wellness, we need to understand neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to grow and change. Often discussed in response to trauma to the brain, neuroplasticity is also the key physical feature that benefits from maintaining intellectual wellness. The exposure to challenging and creative ideas encourages the brain to develop new connections and remain plastic, which helps one stay "sharp." One can encourage neuroplasticity through many avenues including taking continuing education classes, engaging in civic discussions, learning a new physical activity (pickleball, anyone?), leading or attending workshops and seminars in areas of interest, and playing stimulating brain games like crossword puzzles and logic puzzles like Sudoku.

Michael Ebinger of Washington State University notes the importance of deciding to maintain and improve one's intellectual wellness. The process of intellectual wellness encourages continuing to learn new topics and skills to promote curiosity. In turn, curiosity motivates one to learn more and to connect to others. This opens dialogue, creates neural connections, and furthers social interactions.

Did you know that there are centers for lifelong learning associated with most public higher education institutions in Virginia? These organizations cater content to the members' interests and often provide multiple ways to engage in person and virtually. (See side panel for examples) Intellectual wellness can be achieved through an intentional choice to continue to learn and explore. Working toward maintaining and improving your intellectual wellness will also increase capacity in other areas of wellness, including physical and social wellness. To work toward expanding your intellectual wellness, one can look to the excellent advice Ted Lasso (the Apple TV hit show from 2020-2023) regularly offered his team: Be Curious.

Contributed by: Teresa Segelken, M.Ed, Director of Continuing and Professional Studies University of Mary Washington

Opportunities for Lifelong Learning

Examples of Lifelong Learning programs:

- The Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech (cpe.vt.edu/lifelonglearning.html)
This program hosts regular member meetings and offers courses on topics from popular culture and current foreign affairs, to artistic skills development and enjoying fine foods and wine.
- The Mary Washington ElderStudy Center for Lifelong Learning (www.elderstudy.com/)
Associated with the University of Mary Washington, this program offers similar opportunities to expand one's intellectual connections.
- Virginia Navigator (virginianavigator.org)
Check out Virginia Navigator for a list of organizations whose missions align with enhancing intellectual wellness and are tailored to specific areas of interest.

Beet & White Bean Salad

Colorful and nutrient rich salad to serve during your 4th of July celebration.

Source: www.myplate.gov/recipes/myplate-cnpp/beet-white-bean-salad

Ingredients:

Dressing:

- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

Salad:

- 2 3/4 cups whole beets, well-drained and each cut in half (or 16-ounce can)
- 1 can white kidney beans (cannellini) (15-ounce can)
- 1/2 cup reduced-fat crumbled blue cheese
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped walnuts, toasted
- Baby arugula leaves (optional)

Instructions:

1. Wash hands, produce, and equipment thoroughly.
2. Prepare dressing: Combine cider vinegar, Dijon mustard, and sugar. Gradually add olive oil until well blended. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Prepare Salad: Combine beets and white kidney beans; toss with dressing.
4. To serve, place arugula leaves in a serving bowl; top with beet mixture.
5. Sprinkle with crumbled blue cheese and walnuts.

Exercise: Wall Squats

Hip and Thigh Muscles

1. Begin with your back against the wall and feet shoulder-width apart
2. Slide down the wall into a squat with thighs at a 90° angle with the floor.
3. Hold the position for 5 - 10 seconds.
4. Stand and repeat

Resources

Washington State University Health Sciences - Intellectual Wellness -
spokane.wsu.edu/wellness/intellectual-wellness/

Virginia Navigator Lifelong Learning -virginiannavigator.org/article/12296/lifelong-learning

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