



PURIST

AN ADVENTURE IN WELLNESS

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THE 401K FOR YOUR BRAIN

Time to get moving: research shows that exercise has immediate and long-lasting effects on brain health. BY WENDY SUZUKI, PHD • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MORGAN MAASSEN

As a Professor of Neural Science and Psychology at New York University, I am on a mission: to spread the word that physical activity—that is, simply moving your body—is the most transformative thing that you can do to improve your brain today, and the best thing that you can do to protect your brain for the future.

Why do I call it transformative? It is the only lifestyle change that you can implement today that will stimulate the birth of brand-new brain cells in a brain structure, called the hippocampus, critical for our ability to form and retain new long-term memories.

These new brain cells not only help the hippocampus work better, which means your memory works better, but even more importantly, the more new brain cells you generate in your adult life, the more your brain is protected from both aging and neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's in the future.

Think of your brain like a muscle: the more you exercise it, the larger and stronger it gets, and the better it will withstand normal aging as well as the neurodegenerative diseases that come at all of us as we age.

Physical activity also improves the function of yet another brain area—one that is highly susceptible to age-related cognitive decline, and to neurodegenerative diseases. This brain region is called the prefrontal cortex, and its health is vital for ability to perform such tasks as focusing attention and making clear decisions.

Best of all, you don't have to wait weeks or months to reap the rewards. Studies in my lab and other labs have shown that even a single workout can significantly improve mood, focus and reaction time immediately after your workout, and those improvements can last for hours.

For these reasons I refer to exercise like a supercharged 401K for your brain. Jump into a regular exercise routine or ramp up the one you already have, and it will not only protect your brain from aging and neurodegenerative disease in the future, but you will enjoy the immediate brain-boosting benefits of exercise after every exercise session. What could be better motivation than that?

Wendy Suzuki, PhD, is a Professor of Neural Science and Psychology, New York University, and the CEO of BrainBody, brainbody.io 🌸