

5 WAYS TO GET YOUR BRAIN FIT

(and why it matters)

Keeping your brain in tip top condition is essential to long-term business fitness, says **Dr Jenny Brockis**.

COMPLETE HEALTH IS more than attending to our diet and getting physically fit, it's about being brain fit as well. Because when we feel happy, focused and confident, everything functions better.

Brain fitness is about having a fit and healthy brain that allows us to perform at our very best, in all circumstances. Life is getting busier, faster and more complex, so staying at the top of our game requires a high level of mental agility, flexibility and innovative thinking.

The problem is that up until now, we haven't given our brains much attention. However the new brain science has shown how taking care of our brain and using it in the way it is designed for boosts mental performance.

Brain fitness (like physical fitness) takes some time and effort to achieve – after all, we are working with our neurobiology. Following a framework for a brain fitness program reveals the benefits of a sharper, more resilient mind very quickly. The good

thing about our brain is – the more we use it, the better it gets.

There are five things that you can put in place immediately to start to lift your own level of brain fitness.

REFUEL SMART

Topping up our cognitive energy means not skipping meals and including fresh unprocessed food at every meal. The diet most extensively studied for better brain health is the Mediterranean style diet; leafy green vegetables, three portions a week of oily, cold-water carnivorous fish, other lean protein, deeply pigmented fruits and berries, some seeds and nuts, whole grains, olive oil and a little bit of top quality dark chocolate (70% minimum cocoa solids). Who said healthy food has to be boring!

SLEEP RIGHT

Cognitive fatigue is a menace. We can't concentrate, we make more mistakes and we get cranky. Long days, heavy workloads, working late or starting extra early, all add to our cognitive load. We fall into bed longing for sleep, which then eludes us as our brain decides it's party-time and keeps us thinking all night long.

Maintaining good sleep habits with seven

to eight hours of good quality uninterrupted sleep is essential for neuronal health, emotional regulation, the formation of long-term memory and getting the gist what we have learned. Plus it helps for better recall of information at a later date. Putting in place a regular bedtime routine and keeping to it, is a great start.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN A BREAK

Taking work breaks during our day isn't being lazy; it's about working with our brain the way it was designed for. We have peaks and troughs of energy cycling through 90-minute periods during our day. By taking a 20-minute break between each of these allows us to get more done, to a higher level, in less time and with energy left to spare. Take a look at your daily schedule and see when you can next give your brain the break it deserves.

BOOK A ROOM TO THINK

Foggy thinking from having too much on our mind reduces our ability to focus, to solve problems, make good decisions or think creatively. Scheduling some thinking space every day is the perfect way to pause, hone attention and gain clarity of thought. Whether it is a daily mindfulness or other meditation practice, listening to some beautiful music or connecting with some green space, twenty minutes is all it takes to set you up for a great day of thinking. Where is your favourite thinking space?

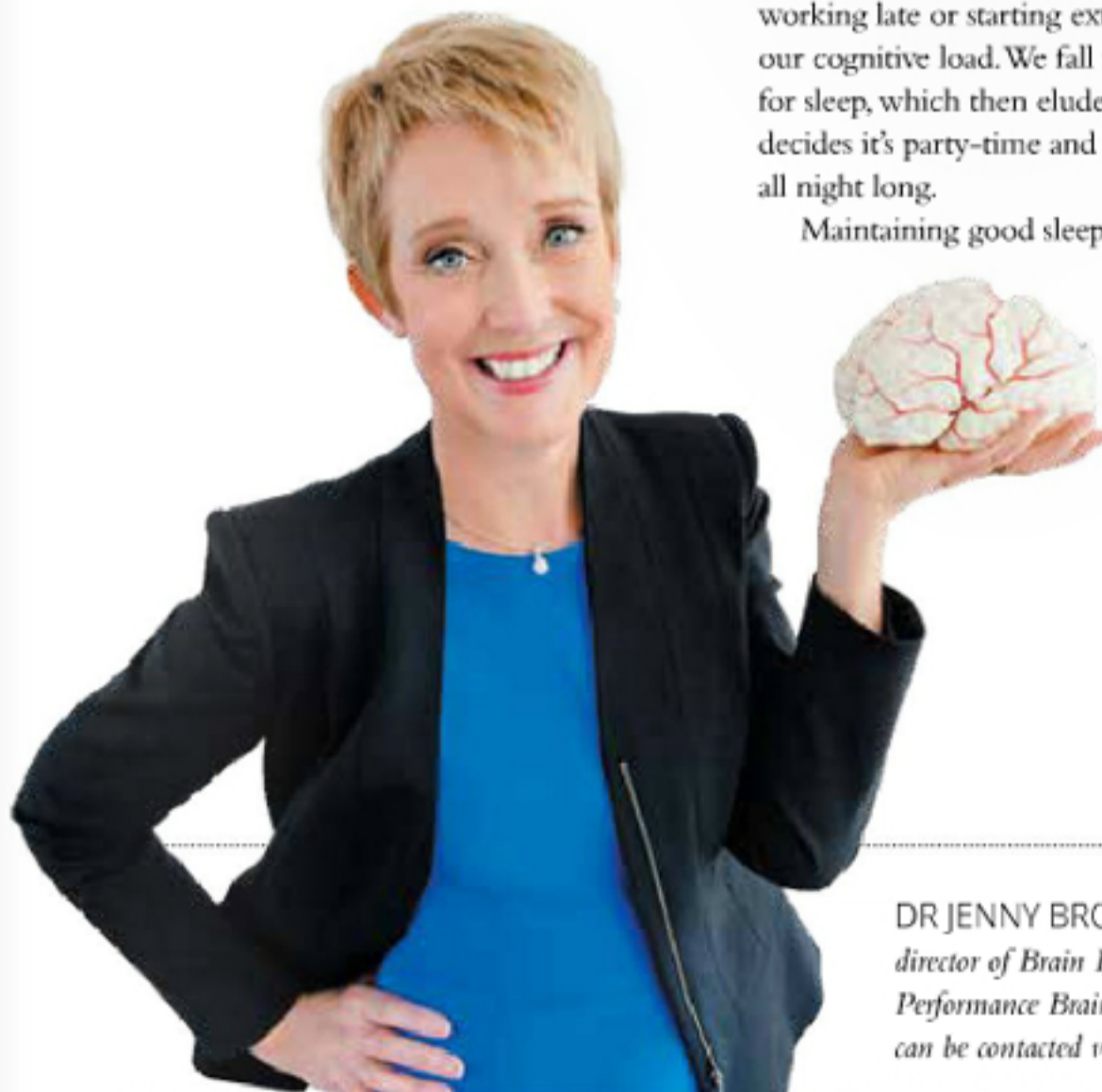
MOVE IT

It's hard to imagine getting fit without some form of physical exercise being involved. Thirty minutes daily of aerobic exercise gives the brain its best workout and primes us for optimum performance.

Exercise boosts attention, cognition and the production of neurochemicals including BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor). It also promotes neurogenesis, the production, survival and maturation of new neurons.

Plus exercise helps to lift our mood, which opens up our mind to new ways of doing things, to learn more effectively and keep us mentally well.

Being brain fit isn't just a nice thing to have. It's an essential for better brain health, better thinking and greater happiness. **PL**



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