

Nine Strategies To Increase Brain Healthy Behavior

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Memorial
BrainWorks™

Summary: Participants in our program, Stressed Out by Your Memory?, increased their involvement with brain-healthy behaviors by over 500%. Scores in the following measures were also significantly increased over wait-control subjects: memory strategy use, satisfaction with memory, sense of personal control over cognitive decline, and memory ability. Rather than drill for high performance on memory tasks, we used nine general strategies to get participants curious and engaged when thinking about memory and brain health. In this way they developed a greater eagerness to participate in new behaviors and strategies. In this session we demonstrate these strategies and the importance of including such motivational elements in brain health programs.

Make Initial Steps Easy

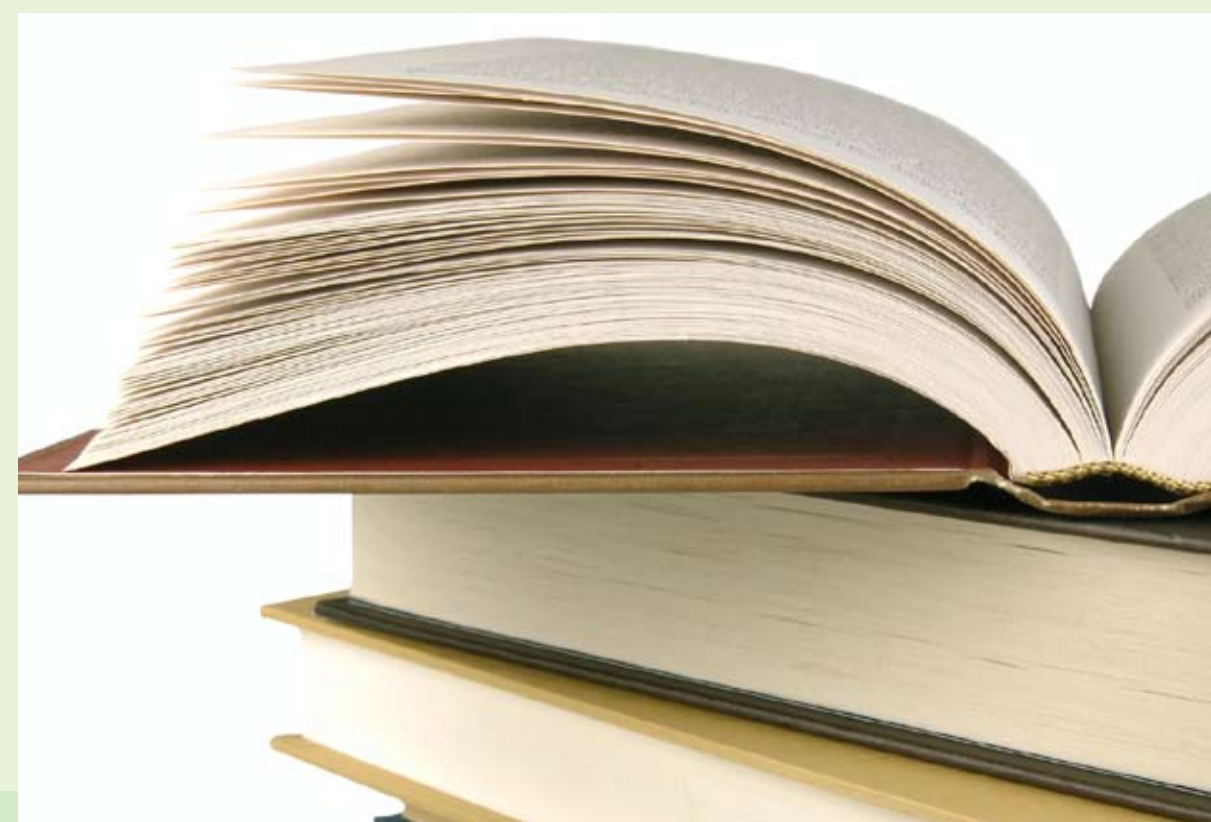
Learning that there are some easier, first steps like paying attention is empowering.



“All week I talked to myself out loud reminding myself to focus. I was able to stop all the skittering that goes on in my mind.”

Give Accurate Information

Myths around aging and memory loss are debunked. Learning about normal age-related changes, the impact that stress has on memory ability, and the role of attitude is greatly appreciated.



“... I realize my brain works best when I am not anxious. Learning about cultivating a positive attitude has been so helpful since this has been a really rough year.”

Share

Practice in and out of the class is encouraged. Sharing activities and experiences through dyads or group discussions enhances the learning.



“I discovered something very meaningful in the 5-minute writing exercise. I realized that my life is not fulfilling, and so at the end I wrote a reminder to myself – Go out and do something about getting a life!”

Encouragement

Instructor stresses that it is more important to engage the brain and practice the technique and not to worry about mastery.



“It is hard for me to create mental pictures, but I understand how necessary this skill is for using the memory and stress management tools. I will continue to practice.”

Provide Choices

Thirty-two tools in seven different areas are introduced: mental & physical stimulation, mental & physical relaxation, problem solving, motivation, and mnemonics.



“I have a new job... and I lack confidence. My memory has been lousy.... This class helps me to experience things in chunks. Each day I go home and review what I learned. I am using strategies to remember my co-workers names. This class helps me to be successful at work.”

Stimulate Curiosity

Instructor knowledge, excitement and passion for the material are crucial and contagious. After learning about brain health, participants are motivated to learn more on their own.



“I went on that AARP website, and now I am addicted to those brain games.”

Role Model

The lives of the great thinkers are studied. They role model the strategies and environments which support flexible thinking.



“To sum it up the right brain wants equal rights with the left brain. I have always been more left brained and have been trying to give expression to the right but haven't known how to go about it. This class has really helped. The mind mapping was a great activity.” (retired engineer)

Provide Feedback

Participants learn more about themselves through the classroom activities and objective/subjective tests that are administered at timed intervals.



“In learning about paying better attention, I realize that my perception of my memory is worse than my memory actually is.”

Improve Assistive Factors

Strong cognitive function requires good general health, sleep, and aerobic exercise, stress management, etc.



“A judge called and asked if I would come out of retirement to work for him. I was upset with having to make the decision and didn't know what to say. We learned a breathing technique so I used that to quit the jabbering that was going on in my mind, and I settled down. A few days later I confidently called the judge back and said no.”

Discussion: Our program was developed to address the problem of fear and anxiety in the older population regarding their memory and cognitive health. Rather than drill or work towards mastery on narrow cognitive tasks, we choose to focus on informing, empowering, and motivating our participants. To us, it is the logical first step. With belief, hope, and some direction for taking action, we believe participants will take actions in ways that are meaningful to them. Questions that remain include: (1) How to balance general knowledge and motivation with skill training for improved performance and, (2) How important is the role of objective feedback in motivation and identification of areas for further training?