

Are you ready?

Christina Caron and Dana G. Smith list ways to keep your mind healthy in 2025

Whatever your answer, there are some tried-and-true habits that can help you feel sharp, alive and well in the coming year — and they're easy to practise. We are continually asking experts about behaviours, conditions and outlooks that influence mental and cognitive health. The tips listed here — some of our favourites from the past year — aren't meant to ensure you'll be upbeat and performing at your best 24/7 (frankly, that just isn't realistic), but they can help you build resilience, find balance and prioritise the things that you hold most dear.

Move your body

If you've heard it once, you've heard it 1,000 times: physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your brain.

Immediately after a workout, people tend to report feeling better emotionally and their performance on tests of working memory and other cognitive functions improves. But the real benefits come from exercising consistently over time: people who do so have a much lower risk of developing depression and dementia.

How can exercise do all this? Scientists think that moving your body leads to extra blood flow and chemicals being released in the brain, which can help build new connections between neurons. In both depression and dementia, many of these neural connections are lost, so a beefed-up brain can actually serve as a buffer against impairment.

Address your anxiety

Confront your fears. Research suggests that directly facing the things that make us anxious can help break a pattern of fear and avoidance. You can do this with a therapist — a process clinicians call exposure therapy — or you can do it on your own.

Challenge your brain

It's still up for debate whether crossword puzzles and brain training games can actually make you smarter or meaningfully lower your risk for demen-



tia. But experts say they can't hurt. The same goes for other cognitively stimulating activities like playing board games, reading books or newspapers, or learning another language.

If something is mentally challenging, "chances are that it is probably pretty good for your brain," said Lesley Ross, a professor of psychology at Clem-

son University in the US.

Get unstuck

We all occasionally feel stuck at work or in our relationships, but there are small things you can do to jump-start your life.

Try a "friction audit". Identify the things that create obstacles and add complications or stress to your everyday and try

to trim them away. To get started, ask: am I repeating certain patterns that are unhelpful? Are there things that I do regularly that I don't enjoy?

Try "futurecasting". Think about what it would look like to be "unstuck". Then think about the specific steps that would help you work toward that vision. Write down those steps — ideally

by hand — and try to do at least one step each day.

Quiet your inner critic

If you often feel as if you never quite measure up, it might be time to accept what's "good enough". Experts suggest letting go of that nagging feeling that you could or should have done more. Instead, give yourself credit for what you accomplish.

Take care of your health

We know that our brain and body are connected, but it's easy to forget just how much one can influence the other. Researchers at the Massachusetts General Hospital McCance Center for Brain Health in the US have driven home how important physical health is for mental and cognitive well-being using a unique format: a quiz that estimates people's risk for dementia, depression and stroke.

The majority of the questions ask about common health metrics (such as blood pressure and cholesterol) and behaviours (including exercise and nutrition), illustrating the fact that the healthier your body is, the healthier your mind is. And if your score isn't as high as you would like, it's not too late to make a change.

Make a new friend

Feeling lonely and isolated can harm our mental health, and it may change our brains, too. To combat loneliness, reach out to a friend or family member — even a short phone call can have a powerful benefit. If you want to make new friends, joining a club or support group is a good place to start. Look for ones that tap into a shared identity, like for widows or new moms, advised Dr Ellen Lee, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego, US. That can give you something immediate to connect over.

Forgive — or don't

Much has been written about why forgiveness is good for us. The process may help you experience fewer negative emotions or thoughts about the person who wronged you.