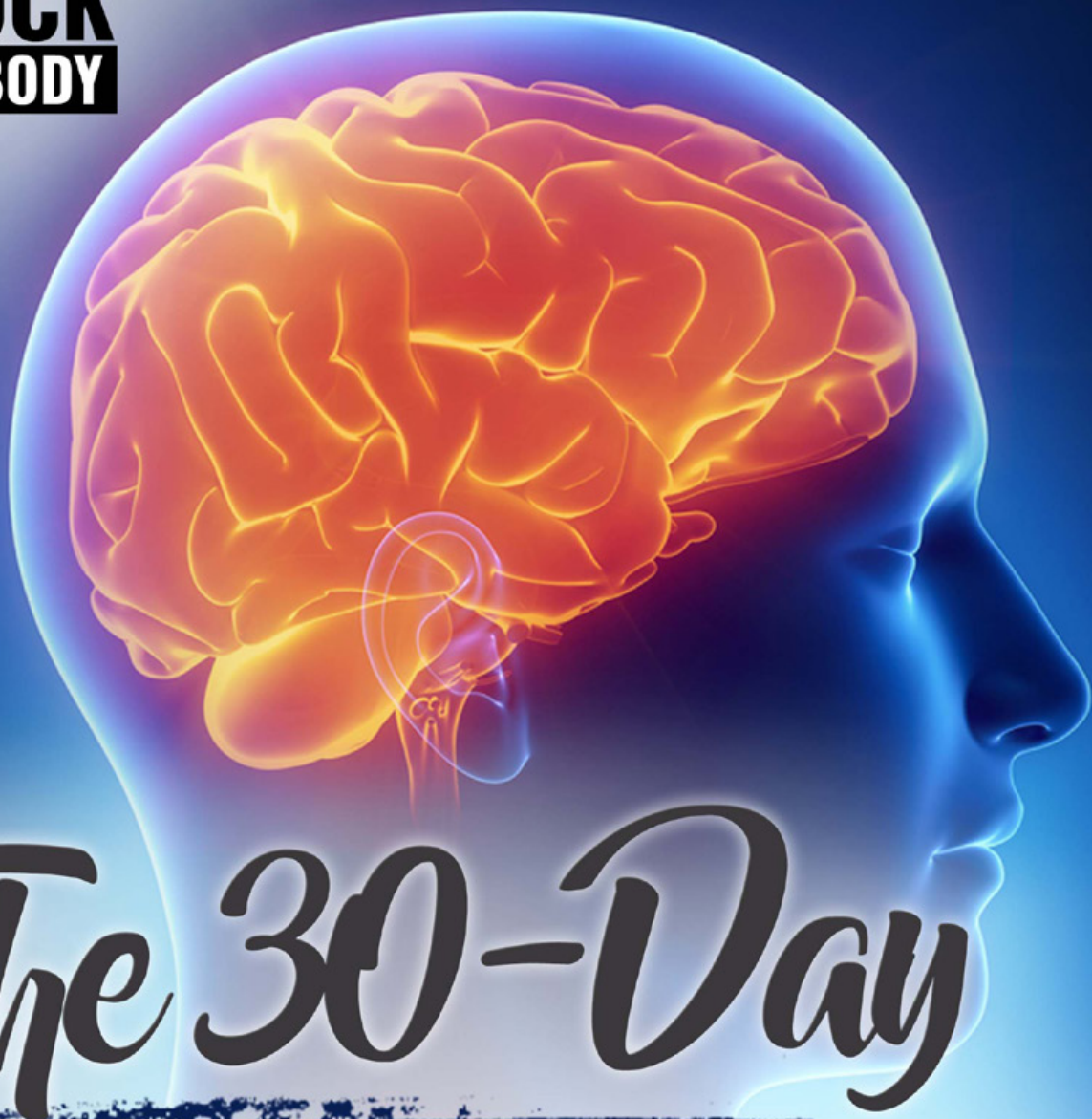


UNLOCK
YOUR BODY



The 30-Day

CHALLENGE TO BETTER BRAIN HEALTH

BY TONYA FINES, HOLISTIC HEALTH PRACTITIONER

LEGAL STUFF

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The 30-Day

**CHALLENGE
TO BETTER BRAIN
HEALTH**

**By Coach Tonya Fines, Board Certified Holistic Health
Practitioner & Nutrition Specialist**

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INTRODUCTION WHY A HEALTHY BRAIN IS IMPORTANT

In an age where modern technology is advancing at the rate humming birds move their wings, one thing is still undeniable: Nothing can match the potential of the human brain! And can you imagine what that potential is when you consider the cognitive growth of a baby even in the first year?!

It really is amazing how the human brain takes in information, processes it, interprets it and then transfers that information to the rest of our body whether in the form of a physical act or emotional reaction.

I know I'm simplifying here but come on ... the human brain is AMAZING!

My point here, other than making it clear that I'm very interested in neuroscience and all things about the brain, is that



our brains are incredibly powerful, and by taking our brain health seriously, we can do a lot to keep it healthy and functioning optimally, well into our senior years.

While we all know that a healthy lifestyle does a lot to impact and influence strong healthy bones and muscles, as well as keep all of our body's systems functioning optimally, our lifestyle

choices also profoundly affect our brain health.

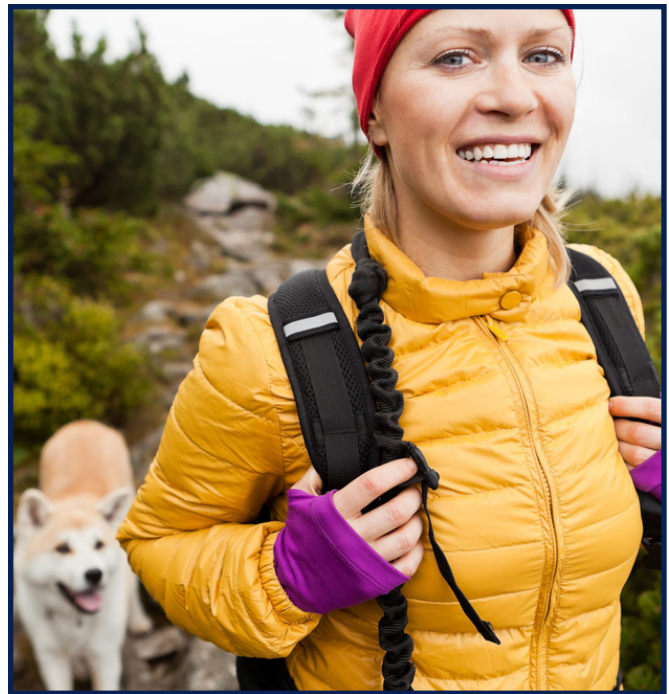
So while you are making nutrition and exercise a priority to keep your body fit and healthy, whether you know it or not, you are also doing a lot of good as far as keeping your brain fit and healthy as well.

Everything that we take into our bodies, the amount of exercise we get, the quality of sleep we get, how well we manage our stress and even the ways in which we socialize all have a tremendous impact on our brain health.

Think about it ... have you ever just had one of those days? You know what I'm talking about ... it actually started the night before with a lousy sleep, followed by a day where nothing seemed to go right and ended with you exhausted, irritated and likely with a pounding headache by that evening.

It happens to all of us and if we are being honest we know that those are the days that we are not in the "right head space."

While we cannot completely avoid days like that from ever happening, by making the best lifestyle choices we can, we just increase the potential for better brain health.



This 30 day challenge is all about that to help you to set up a solid plan for keeping your brain as healthy and fit as possible, while navigating the everyday challenges that life can throw your way.

THE FOCUS 5

5 AREAS OF BRAIN HEALTH WHERE YOU CAN MAKE AN IMPACT

While nothing is 100%, there are a lot of things that we can do to increase our chances of greater health and wellness, and that includes our brain health.

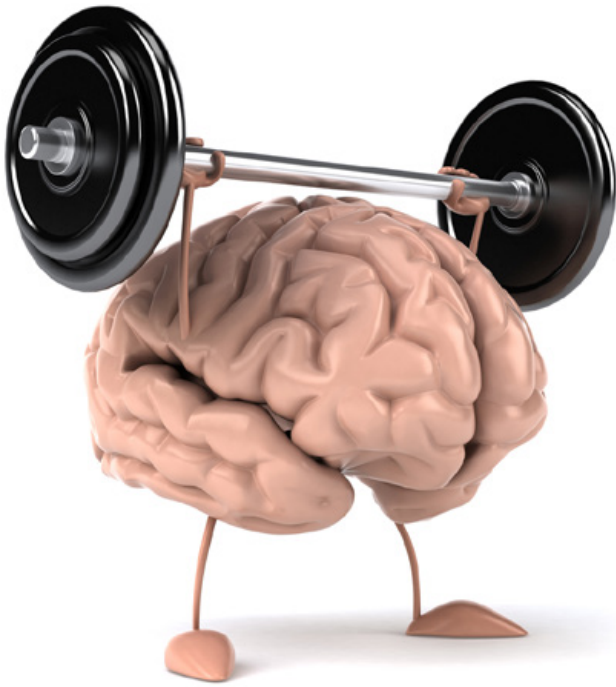
So while you may be thinking, “well, what about all of the things that can negatively affect and impact brain health that I cannot control,” let me remind you that taking the best care of yourself now, before a possible health concern shows up, is about the best health insurance there is!

I have decided to focus on 5 main areas that I believe are key to supporting better brain health. These 5 focus areas are: exercise, nutrition, mindfulness, sleep, and learning.

Yes, nothing here is new nor jaw-



dropping, however, what you can do within each of these 5 focus areas to promote better brain health may be news to you, or perhaps never really thought about before.



So let's get right into then!

Exercise

By now you must be wondering if I never include exercise into each challenge in some way, and that would be fair. The bottom line is that the benefits of regular exercise to the human body are just too profound to neglect. And for this challenge I'm not actually talking about brain exercises like puzzles and sudoku. I'm talking about the impact that physical exercise has on your brain.

Several studies have been done that clearly indicate that regular aerobic exercise not only helps to preserve existing brain cells, but also facilitates the growth of new brain cells. How cool is that! A study published in

the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, reported that there is a link between long-term moderate aerobic activity and an increase in the volume of the hippocampus, the area of the brain where long-term memories are formed. (1)

So how much is enough? Well if you are someone who is already exercising regularly, don't stop that behavior. Keep it up and continue to do things that you enjoy so that you will want to keep it up. If exercise is something that you do for a bit and then stop, begin by making it a weekly goal to get in at least 2 hours.

That is only 30 minutes 4 days out of the week, and it doesn't have to be something BIG.

Be realistic when setting your goals and set yourself up for success and celebration. A 30 minute brisk walk during the day or early evening is a great start and I'm sure you can fit that into your day.

Nutrition

Yes, I'm becoming predictable! But just as exercise has far reaching benefits to your health and wellness, so does your nutrition. Everything that we put



into our mouths feeds our cells and the last time I checked, our brains were comprised of cells just like the rest of our body is. So when you think nutrition, think “smart” foods! And no, this is not where I give you a long list of everything you have to exclude from your diet that you love. What I am going to do however, is include a list of Best Brain Foods for you to look at and which I strongly encourage you to begin including into your meals and snacks if you aren’t already.

So how should we be eating in order to support better brain health? Well, to be honest, it’s not all that different really

from eating in a way that supports your overall health and wellness.

There may be some foods that, although not consciously, you may be neglecting or not regularly including in your diet that can have a pretty big influence in feeding brain cells. Think healthy fats like avocado, and antioxidant rich foods like blueberries to fuel your brain, reduce cellular stress and fight inflammation.

Science has also shown us that a diet rich in omega-3’s not only helps to build and repair brain cells, but can also improve a person’s cognitive abilities.

Mindfulness

Okay, stop rolling your eyes! When I say mindfulness, I’m suggesting slowing down so that instead of staying in what may be a pattern of emotional reaction, you can create a new behavior of “pause.”

This pause may be the key to learning how to become more mindful of a situation and therefore, ultimately work wonders in helping to reduce stress or at least manage it better.

Mindfulness does not always have to involve meditation, or spending time locked away in solitary confinement to

reach some stage of enlightenment. The thought of that alone may elevate stress levels for some of you.

Mindfulness, at least how I'm speaking of it in this challenge, is about becoming more aware. More aware of what is going on around you. More aware of what things may be triggering you and causing you greater stress and anxiety.

More aware so that instead of continuing a pattern of reaction, which elevates anxiety, you can learn to recognize and manage those triggers and work towards reducing anxiety.

Anxiety takes a tremendous toll on our brains. It puts us into a state of "fight or flight" which is not a relaxing state to be in. And while fight or flight does have a time and place to be effective, constantly getting into this state will take its toll on your mental health and in some cases your vascular health.

Being able to develop greater mindfulness in your day will help you to better relax when a situation becomes anxious, and take advantage of pockets of time to step away from hectic and stressful situations.

Practicing this will help to better

support your ability to reduce the risk that stress and anxiety can have on your brain health.

But how do you become more mindful and then practice mindfulness? First don't overthink this ... we are trying to decrease stress and anxiety, not increase it. This is not meant to be a "chore." The first step is to get real about what your triggers are; the things that have a tendency to set you off.

Are these things you can either avoid or remove from your life or the environment where they seem to be a constant? If yes, then that takes care of that. If not, then what are some things you can do to become less reactive to are less impacted by them?

This may take a day or two to come up with a solution, but there are ways to not let triggers have as much influence and impact on you as you may currently be allowing them to.

Ask yourself, "What is it about this that is really causing me anxiety?" What are you gaining by reacting or getting stressed out every time this shows up? Have you maybe just established an almost unconscious pattern of reacting?

In other words, is it that it's become your default ... that you have become less aware and are truthfully repeating a pattern of reaction that you've been engaged in for a while now to the point that it's almost "normal" for you?

Other things you can do are more about establishing some new practices that allow you moments to just stop and breathe in your day. These little pockets of time give you a "brain break," and over time, if you are consistent can have a very big impact on having a long term effect on how you perceive certain situations, just how intensely they influence you, and whether or not you react.

What are some things that you enjoy doing, that actually take you out of the rat race of your day and where you will slow down? Do you enjoy reading? Do you enjoy working out? Do you enjoy going for walks? Is there a favorite coffee shop you like to go and enjoy a quiet cup of coffee?

Maybe you are someone who does enjoy meditation and yoga! Whatever your "thing" is, make it a priority to do more of that in your week to increase mindfulness and decrease stress, anxiety and the effects they are having on your brain health.



Sleep

All of us are aware that a good night's sleep can make a world of difference in your day. Quality rest is what allows us to recharge so that we are set to take on our day not only physically but mentally as well. I'm sure many of you have experienced sleepless nights and that several sleepless nights in a row can cause us to be, well ... not exactly the best version of ourselves.

But how does this directly relate to and affect our brain health? Well, there are numerous studies that show there are structural and physiological changes that happen in our brain while we sleep, and these changes affect our ability for learning as well as impacting memory. (2)

It is often recommended that people get between 7-9 hours of sleep, but that can vary from individual to

individual. I personally, know many people whom 5 hours is their optimum sleep time. Any more or less than that and ... YIKES!

Most of us know how much sleep we need to really function optimally and get through our day. But what happens when, for whatever reason, we are start having trouble falling asleep and/or staying asleep to get adequate, quality sleep.

My first suggestion would be to read over the above section on mindfulness and take a look at what stressors in your life may be influencing your inability to get a good night's sleep because your brain is working over-time. Following that, I would then suggest establishing a really good, consistent evening routine.

Our body responds very well to routines and when we establish one and can stick to it, it can have massive benefit in helping us to better achieve the reasons behind establishing routines. Sleep is one of those things that we can certainly create a healthy routine for in order to set us up for sleep success.

Establishing a brain healthy routine to support better sleep is all about getting

into THE ZONE! Yes, we need to start teaching our brain by the behaviors we engage in prior to bedtime, that the day is coming to an end and it's time to punch the clock.

Your routine is going to be whatever works for you ... warm bath right before bed, light reading, turning lights low, etc. The point is establishing a routine and sticking with it

Learning a New Skill

This idea is not new or "new age" at all really. Neuroscientists and doctors have known for years that learning a new skill has a big influence on helping to improve brain health and keep your brain sharp! It's sometimes referred to as brain training and in some areas it's big business!

So just how challenging a new skill do you have to learn in order for this to benefit brain health? Relax, it's not like you need to take astrophysics. The basic premise is that taking on and learning something that is new to you, something you have not done or have little experience in, that requires you to use your brain to learn new skill is the criteria.

One study involving 200 seniors, divided individuals into 2 groups. One



group took up photography and the other quilting. Each group participated in learning their new skill for 15 hours a week.

At the end of 3 months these seniors were all given a series of memory tests and compared to groups of senior who engaged strictly in social activities, but nothing that was mentally challenging: watching movies, social gatherings, listening to music, etc.

The results showed that not only did

those seniors who had to learn a new skill show significant improvement in their memory at the end of the 3 month study, but also that the level of improvement was sustained 12 months later when they were tested again! (3)

What is something you have always wanted to learn, but never made time for? Maybe now is a better time than ever to dive into something new and at the same time increase your brain health and support those memory centers of your brain.

THE BRAIN-GUT CONNECTION

Have you ever had that feeling of “butterflies in your stomach?” AHA! That right there, without even bringing science into the conversation, confirms that your brain and your gut are indeed connected. (4).

They are so connected actually that there are 500 million neurons in your gut that are connected to your brain via the central nervous system ... yes, I just brought science back into the conversation. (5)

The largest nerve connecting your brain and your gut is the vagus nerve and it send signals in both directions. This nerve is largely believed to impact the communication between your gut and your brain with respect to stress, since several animal studies have shown that stress hinders signals sent through the vagus nerve, resulting in gastrointestinal issues. (6)

Neurotransmitters also connect your brain and your gut. These neurotransmitters control feelings



and emotions, so whether you are feeling happy or sad, you will not only be aware of them in your mind, but you may also be feeling them in your stomach.

There are also trillions of microbes in your gut that influence how your brain works. These gut microbes are a big player as far as your immune system function and inflammation.

For example, a compromised immune system can result in inflammation and inflammation is associated with several brain disorders such as dementia, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and clinical depression.

This leads us to ask, "What can we do to maintain good gut health as a means to support better brain health?" It's a good question and one I'd not thought too much about until my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Now you may be someone who is very diligent with taking probiotics and if you are that is fantastic! Gut health is very important and I think more of us need to pay more attention to that. However, if you are not that disciplined it comes to taking a probiotic - it's not a hard thing to work into your daily lifestyle.

First of all there are certain foods you can include into your diet that will help to keep your gut flora up. Yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kombucha, olives, miso and tempeh are just a few examples.

If you prefer to supplement, there is no

shortage of probiotics available on the market today.

If you, like myself, find it overwhelming to look at shelves of what seems like thousands of options, talk to your doctor, a pharmacist, naturopath, etc., to help point you in the right direction so that you are getting a probiotic that best fits your needs and lifestyle.



YOUR BRAIN ON SUPPLEMENTS DO THEY REALLY WORK?

The jury is pretty much still out on this. While research continues, because as we all know the supplement industry is a multi-billion dollar business, there is not much as far as findings that 100% confirm that supplementing for brain health has any real long term effect.

In my opinion there are a few things going on here that influence this “grey area” of brain health. One, this is an area of health that, like the weight loss industry, is driven by fear and the desire for something to work quickly, effectively and long term.

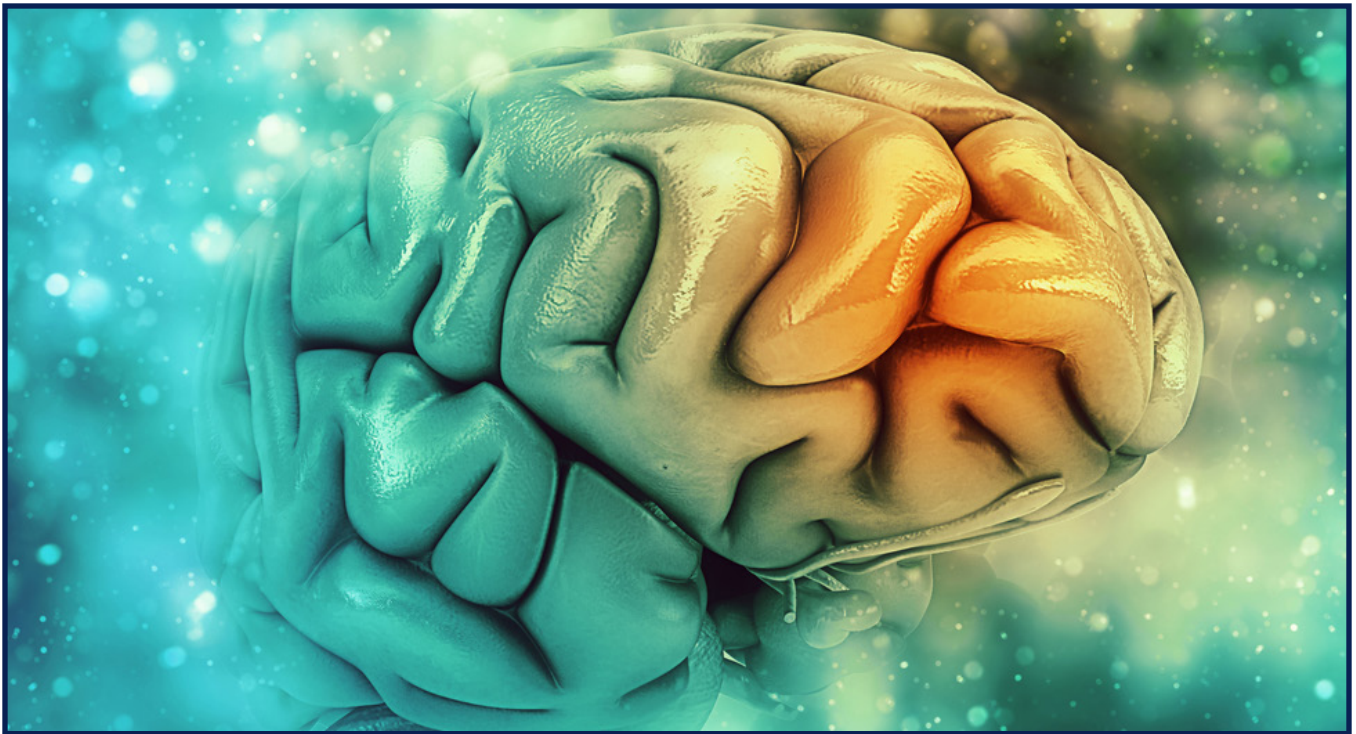
There is certainly a growing concern with people as they get older, to want to sustain good cognitive function and prevent/slow memory loss. This can lead to spending a lot of money on supplements that may largely be providing nothing more than a short term placebo effect.

In the United States, supplements are not

regulated by the FDA the same way that prescription medications are. This results in supplements making their way onto market shelves with little to no reassurance of their efficacy. What does that mean for you and I?

Potentially a LOT of money spent on something that may not be helping us at all or having any impact whatsoever.





My intent is not to dissuade you from taking supplements marketed to support brain health or better brain function.

My point is that we just do not have enough solid, firm evidence to show us which supplements will really have the kind of impact many of us would like from a brain supplement.

Here is what I think ... if you are really set on taking a brain supplement that you believe provides a benefit to supporting your brain health, then by all means discuss this with your doctor and barring any risk to you, you should be fine.

However, there is another point I really

want to stress and impress upon you.

In researching information for this challenge, as well as 27 years of working in the health and wellness industry, it is my personal and professional opinion that taking care of yourself and paying attention to those 5 focus areas of brain health will have a greater impact and influence on your brain health.

Nothing is 100%, but we do know that the better we take care of ourselves, the greater our chances of enjoying quality of life as we age.

BEST BRAIN FOODS

Here is a list of foods that you may want to start including, if you are not consuming them already, into your diet to help support better brain health.

Salmon
Tuna
Sardines

Dark Chocolate

Blueberries
Strawberries
Blackberries
Black Currents

Almonds
Walnuts

Sunflower Seeds
Pumpkin Seeds

Brown Rice
Oatmeal
Quinoa
Barley
Whole Grain Breads
Whole Grain Pastas

Coffee

*** limit to 3 cups max per day ***



EXERCISE TRACKER

Use this chart to help track your exercise routine each day and your total exercise time.

Exercise		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1	Type of Exercises							
	Total Time Exercising							
Week 2	Type of Exercises							
	Total Time Exercising							
Week 3	Type of Exercises							
	Total Time Exercising							
Week 4	Type of Exercises							
	Total Time Exercising							

DAILY MINDFULNESS JOURNAL NOTES

Use the sheets below to journal what your triggers are, what you are doing to eliminate/reduce them from your life, as well as changes you are noticing in becoming more mindful and less anxious or stressed.

Brian Challenge		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1	Triggers							
	What you are doing to reduce them from your life							
Week 2	Triggers							
	What you are doing to reduce them from your life							
Week 3	Triggers							
	What you are doing to reduce them from your life							
Week 4	Triggers							
	What you are doing to reduce them from your life							

30 DAY SLEEP TRACKER

Use this chart to help you establish a consistent evening routine to support better quality sleep as well as the hours of sleep you are getting each night.

Sleeping		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1	New Routine							
	Hours Slept							
Week 2	New Routine							
	Hours Slept							
Week 3	New Routine							
	Hours Slept							
Week 4	New Routine							
	Hours Slept							

FINAL THOUGHTS

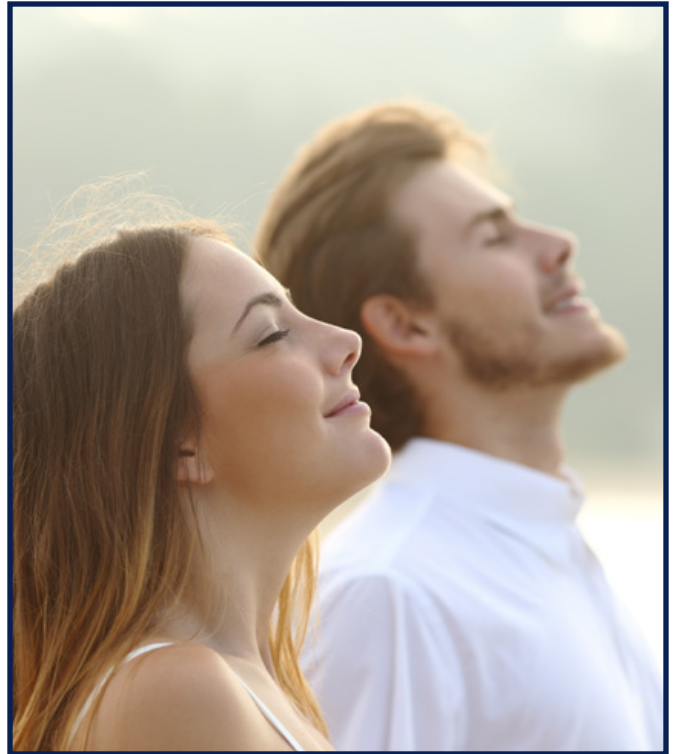
I believe it's safe to assume that all of us want to enjoy the greater quality of life possible as we age. Yes, we are going to experience our body's slowing down and even our minds slowing down however, getting older does not have to mean getting old.

The lifestyle choices we are making now and how we choose to treat our body today and every day is our greatest investment as far as life insurance policies go.

This does not mean that you will never get sick or that you will not experience something you had hoped to avoid with respect to your health and longevity in your lifetime.

What it does mean, is that you are increasing the odds in your favor to live longer, healthier and happier.

Making brain health a priority is not just about staying mentally sharp and being able to hold recall memories. Your brain has such massive impact on your



entire body, sending it signals every day to keep things functioning and running in tip-top shape.

By making the effort to keep your brain healthy you are giving yourself the best chance to live fulfilled and happy as you age, enjoying your senior years.

Be well. Be happy. Be healthy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tonya has worked in the Health, Fitness & Wellness industry for over 25 years. She holds a B.Sc. with Deans Honors in Physical Education & Biology from St. Francis Xavier University, a Diploma in Holistic Nutrition from the Canadian Institute of Alternative Medicine & is a Board Certified Holistic Health Practitioner with the American Association of Drugless Practitioners, with her focus being on nutrition.

While her career started out very much in science, it became very clear to Tonya early on that real, impactful change for greater health & wellness was much more sustainable, when it was included as part of the bigger picture; embracing not only the physical body but the mind & the spirit as well. There was a need for an awareness and lasting sustainable beyond counting calories and doing push-ups.

Working with others to help them achieve their goals in living a life of sustainable health and wellness, by facilitating breaking the down of barriers and working through



destructive patterns of behavior, is how Tonya's clients are able to achieve long term, sustainable success, and live a life of healthy balance.

While nutrition is an important component of living healthier and disease free, it is part of a much bigger equation. By recognizing patterns of behavior that are sabotaging the very things we want most, we are able to create massive change and step into a place personal power to consciously make better choices and live with incredible health and wellness.

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