



#HEALTH & FITNESS

5 hobbies that can boost MENTAL HEALTH AND CLARITY

In a world where our minds are constantly bombarded with information, finding activities that not only entertain but also enhance cognitive function is a win-win. From the rhythmic motions of knitting to the immersive worlds of books, and the strategic challenges of puzzles and board games, these hobbies offer more than just a way to pass the time. They are brain-boosting powerhouses that can improve memory, concentration, and even stave off cognitive decline. So, whether you're an avid reader, or a puzzle enthusiast, there's no better time to embrace these activities and give your brain the workout it deserves.

Knitting

Those who knit know it to be a calming, almost meditative pursuit. According to research, the rhythmic and repetitive motion of knitting reduces stress, boosts mood, improves concentration, helps to manage chronic pain, and even treats addiction and eating disorders.

"The activity is not mindless, however," says Hamida Rehan, a school teacher who knits for pleasure.

"By requiring me to alternate knits and purl stitches, knitting keeps me alert. I'm no scientist,

but I'm sure this helps my brain function better!"

Knitting is also extremely beneficial for older people, aiding in memory retention and reasoning, and reducing their chances of developing cognitive impairment, and memory loss. The hobby, often bearing the harsh reputation of being monotonous, has the potential to reduce the chances of



Alzheimer's and dementia by 30 to 50 per cent.

Reading

While on the surface, reading a book increases one's knowledge, the merits of reading do not end there. Research has shown that reading can strengthen the brain, engaging a complex network of circuits and signals, which grow more and more refined through habit.

The National Institute of Ageing in Maryland, USA has found that reading can also reverse cognitive decline that happens due to ageing. While it is not confirmed that it can prevent issues such as dementia, there is

conclusive evidence that maintains that older people who read every day are more likely to improve their cognitive function than those who do not.

Puzzles and board games

The human brain is as much muscle, as it is a supercomputer, and therefore must be exercised from time to time. Board games, word games, and puzzles are good exercises for the brain as they present complexity and can therefore boost brain plasticity.

"I'm an avid puzzler," says Rajan Das, a 22-year-old student and teacher. "I started with 100-piece puzzles and I've worked my way up to 500. There's no way I can hurry a puzzle along — some days are easier than others but piecing together a 500-piece picture is not something I can do in an hour!"

Rajan admits to sitting with the puzzle



diligently for 45 minutes a day, making steady progress.

Puzzles are also known to increase focus and mindfulness, which makes them ideal for cognitive growth. Crosswords, riddles, and card games are equally good brain sharpeners.

Exercising

The merits of exercise are no secret; physical activity can be supremely beneficial to both physical and psychological health. With the ability to lower stress hormones, exercise has been proven to reduce loss of brain volume, which in turn helps with boosting cognitive function, and lower shrinkage in parts of the brain that are associated with memory.

According to research, regular exercise can help with both convergent thinking, which is the ability to solve problems, as well as divergent thinking, which is the ability to churn out creative ideas.

Arisa Mayar, a middle-aged housewife says that she has made it a habit to exercise every day.

"I do a bit of everything — sometimes it's yoga, sometimes Pilates, and other times, it's swimming. If nothing else, I put on some music and dance for 30 minutes."

Mayar mentions that she feels groggy on the days she is unable to work out. "It has



become a crucial part of my daily routine."

Gardening

What is better than exercising your brain? Doing it in some fresh air, of course!

Gardening is a relaxing activity that enhances brain functions that have to do with learning, problem-solving, strength, agility and endurance, and it is as good as a full workout too!

"The good thing about gardening is that it no longer needs a yard," announced Ruby Quayum, a fifty-five-year-old empty nester. "I do it in my veranda, and my friends and I share a rooftop garden where we grow some of our veggies!"

Adding to its benefits, research has now shown that a 20-minute, low-to-medium intensity gardening session a day showed increased levels of brain nerve growth while also decreasing chances of dementia by up to 30 per cent.

Considering that a gardener must multitask too, from studying the maintenance of healthy growth cycles to planning and mapping landscapes, gardening makes for a challenging brain exercise.

By Munira Fidai

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