

# Brain Blitz



## Leader's Guide

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

### Educational Goals

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

Identify differences between typical age-related and more serious changes in mental functioning

Identify potential causes of mental confusion and forgetfulness

Identify health and lifestyle practices that maximize a person's ability to maintain and enhance mental functioning, regardless of age

Identify and practice techniques to stimulate mental functioning

Utilize memory tools and techniques to trigger memory

on the evaluation form that begins, "One clue to assess if a memory lapse is serious or not is ....." After the discussion on stress, participants could complete the statement on the evaluation form, "To manage stress I will . . . ."

Have lots of fun, laughter and movement throughout the lesson.

To do this you might:

\* Do a reality check after you've talked about the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease. Have the group as a whole answer such questions as what day of the week is it, what year is this, or the name of the governor of Kansas.

\* Either follow or introduce new sections of material by having participants do something brain-challenging. For example, after you have discussed the importance of good nutrition, have them write their favorite healthful food on their handout by spelling the food backwards; or before you discuss the importance of regular physical activity use their non-dominant hand to draw a happy face by the handout headline "Regular Physical Activity" to remind them to be happy and positive about getting plenty of physical activity.

\* When you discuss the importance of drinking plenty of fluids, pass out bottles of water and have everyone take a few sips.

\* For the advice to "Get Plenty of Sleep," write the following statement on a big poster, "Get Plenty of Sleep. Regular loss of an hour or two of needed sleep can impair brain function." Turn the poster upside down and have the group read the poster aloud together. Or, have participants draw a clock face by the "Get Plenty of Sleep" headline with the hands of the clock indicating the time they think they should go to bed to get the amount of sleep they need.

\* For "Use Humor," tell a short, silly joke. Have participants repeat the joke. Then, invite participants to laugh, engaging their full body. Encourage participants to repeat the joke a couple more times in the next day or two if they want to remember it. Avoid humor that centers around sex, religion and politics.

### Suggested Program Presentation Guide

There is more material in the Brain Blitz fact sheet than can typically be covered in one presentation. Teach the section of the fact sheet that is of greatest interest or concern to your audience such as typical mental processing changes, nutritional aspects of maintaining sharp mental functioning, or brain-boosting activities.

Engage the audience as much as possible in activities that will help them enhance and maintain sharp mental functioning. For example, begin with the breathing exercise that is explained on the Brain-Boosting Exercises handout. Put on some lively music. March or dance in place. Move feet and arms. Do some simple stretching and bending exercises. Be sure to explain that they must be their own monitor and not do anything that might cause them injury.

Incorporate the lesson evaluation into your presentation. Give participants two copies of the evaluation. Explain that one is for you and one is for them to keep. Notice that the evaluation is worked from the bottom of the page to the top — another way to challenge the brain is by doing something a different way. After you have discussed the difference between typical changes associated with aging and signs of Alzheimer's disease, have participants complete the statement

\* Help your audience “Maintain a Positive Attitude” by shaking hands with at least two people around them and thanking them for something such as being a pleasant person to sit beside or greeting you with a smile. This is a good opportunity to teach the “arthritis handshake.” Instead of grasping another’s hand, grasp them on the forearm. The “arthritis handshake” is kinder to those with arthritis and is less likely to pass disease-causing organisms from hand to hand. A handshake and greeting is good social contact — another important way to keep the brain engaged.

\* Conclude the presentation by giving everyone a copy of a positive, uplifting poem or a reading that has at least 13 lines. Divide the group into four smaller groups. Have each group take turns reading lines aloud. Have everyone read the last line together. Remind participants that reading aloud engages different parts of the brain than reading silently. Also, taking turns is more complex than reading straight through. When reading as a group, and especially when taking turns, it is likely they may miss the meaning of the words as they concentrate on remembering their turn. To grasp the meaning of the words, they may have to read the same text over later.

\* Ask participants to complete one copy of the lesson evaluation and return it to you. Have them complete the second evaluation as their “take-home messages” reminder.

### **Suggested Roll Calls or Ideas to Introduce Brain Blitz**

\* Something I do to keep my mental processes at their best.

\* My favorite brain-teaser activity or game is ...

\* A brain workout that can be done with a child that is good for both of us.

\* Name pairs of things that are opposite such as brother/sister; up/down; salt/pepper; right/left.

\* Spell your name backwards.

\* Give each participant an unlined index card and have them write the following sentence in pictures: “I love Kansas bread.”

\* Have each participant write his or her name or draw something simple, such as a flower or a stick person, on an index card using the non-dominant hand. Then during roll call, the participants show their cards.

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## **Brain Blitz Activities**

### **Use your other hand**

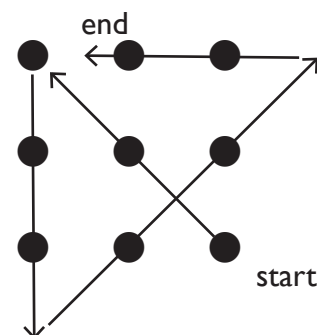
Surprise your brain by using your non-dominant hand to eat, comb your hair, button your clothes, or other tasks.

### **Alphabetical sentences**

Arrange the words in each of the following sentences alphabetically:

- Taking three or more different medications (including over-the-counter drugs) can put you at risk for poor nutritional health.
- One key to living well with life’s stresses is to make sure there are enough times of relaxation to balance out times of stress.
- The natural sweetness of fruit can satisfy cravings for other sweets that may be higher in calories and fat.

### **Connect the dots solution**



## Breathe, Breathe, Breathe

Breathing deeply is one of the most important things we can do to keep our minds mentally alert. Twenty percent of the air we breathe goes to our brains. Seniors are notoriously shallow breathers. Practice this breathing exercise, as advocated by Dr. Andrew Weil, on a daily basis and especially before doing a mental aerobic exercise.

You may want to do this sitting with your back straight, lying on your back, or standing or walking.

Exhale completely through the mouth, making an

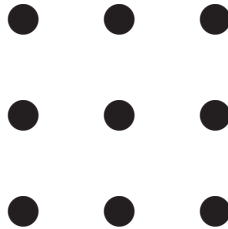
audible sound. Then, close the mouth and inhale quietly through the nose to a count of four. Hold the breath for a count of seven. Next, exhale audibly through the mouth to a count of eight. Repeat for a total of four cycles, then breathe normally.

The speed with which you do the exercise is unimportant. What is important is the ratio of four to breathe in, seven to hold, and eight to exhale.

*(Source: Aerobics of the Mind: 100 Exercises for a Healthy Brain, by Marge Engelman)*

## Connect the Dots

Without lifting your pencil from the paper, draw four straight, connected lines which will go through all nine dots. Think beyond the usual restrictions you put on yourself. (Your instructor has the solution to this puzzle.)



**Read the recipe for better sleep upside down.**

1 cup warm milk	
1 regular bedtime hour	<b>Optional additions</b>
1 quiet, dark, comfortable room	1 low fat snack
1/2 hour quiet time before bed	1 humidifier
1/2 hour soft music, reading or meditation while trying to fall asleep	5 minutes muscle-relaxing exercise
Mix well and sleep until done (rising time). Do not add a stimulating book or television show just before mixing.	1 teaspoon honey in 1 cup hot water

Sleep patterns normally change as we age. Older adults take longer to fall asleep, waken more frequently and spend less time in deep sleep. This is normal.

## Recipe for Better Sleep

# Brain Blitz

## My Personal Goals and What I Learned

(Start at the bottom of the page and work up — it's a good change for the brain!)

8. One more thing I have to say is \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Something I learned in Brain Blitz that I want to remember is \_\_\_\_\_

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6) Draw a happy face in the box by the statement you think is most true for you:

There are many things I can do to keep my mind sharp.

I expect that my mental abilities will diminish as I get older in spite of what I do.

5. One habit I plan to adopt because it will help me maintain my mental abilities is \_\_\_\_\_

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4. To manage stress I will \_\_\_\_\_

3. My goal is to eat \_\_\_\_\_ cups of fruits and vegetables each day.

2. My goal for physical activity is \_\_\_\_\_ minutes per day.

1. One clue to assess if a memory lapse is serious or not is \_\_\_\_\_

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Please return one copy of this to your instructor.

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