

SENIOR SCAPE: Your Inner Child

Revive Your Inner Child

By Sylvia Dickens

Have you lost touch with your inner child? You know, that young person you used to be who was intensely curious about the world? Some children were more inquisitive than others; some were more adventurous and willing to try new things.

When you think about it, it's rather sad that those traits fade over the years. We become more set in our ways. The idea of trying something new lacks intensity. We're content to sit back and let the world go by. Meanwhile, our brain power is suffering.

This doesn't have to happen. Just reconnect with your inner child. Get curious again. Try new things. Experiment with new directions and ideas. Not only will it help ward off depression and stagnation, but it will have a tremendous impact on the health of your mind and body.

Are you a regular badminton, pickle ball or table tennis player? Do you habitually play cards or mahjong at the Centre?

These are all good activities that provide a lot of benefits. The problem is that if this is all you do each week, you are neglecting yourself. You are exercising only a small part of your brain's capabilities which can lead to deterioration in other areas from lack of use.

Your brain is constantly responding to life changes. They stimulate the brain to create new neural pathways to find solutions and compensate for any loss of function when brain injuries occur. If these areas are not strong, the neural changes are less likely to be effective. Simply speaking, your chances of regaining your previous healthy state after a stroke are diminished.

When certain activities are repeated, the brain tends to fall back on the same existing neural pathways. It is important, therefore, for the brain to be exposed to, and challenged by, new experiences and cognitive abilities. In seniors, such exercises help ward off cognitive impairment.

Keep your mind sharp

Perhaps you've decided that cognitive deterioration is inevitable, apart from the effects of strokes. Fortunately, there is something you can do to stay sharp. A new study in the journal *Neurology* suggests that regular cognitive stimulation in all areas of the brain can ease the effects of physical brain deterioration and slow cognitive decline.

A 2013 scientific study suggests that strengthening your brain throughout life also can help it to resist damage later. In the event of brain damage, a strong neural system can rewire itself, relying on backdoors and detours to maintain brain function.

So how do you do that and where do you get these brain exercises?

Lumosity

If you've been ignoring those television ads for Lumosity.com, you're making a huge mistake. This site offers cognitive exercises that can keep you sharp and even strengthen your thinking processes in five key areas: speed, attention, memory, flexibility and problem solving.

The exercises are designed as fun games to help you improve your numerical calculations, information processing, working memory and task switching. The more you practice, the more your mind improves. You can join free to test it out, but thereafter you'll probably want to get a yearly membership for around \$50.

Over time, you can compare your abilities with other members in your age group. Each time you practice, you can work to improve your last score, get faster and more proficient, and extend your skills.

The site also tracks your results, so you can see how well you are doing. You can compare yourself with other site members in your age group. The good news is that it's fun, it's challenging, and you can see how you are improving right away.

In the meantime, you will want to continue to enjoy your regular games at the Centre, but don't ignore the other challenges that the Centre offers. Try new activities. Exercise other parts of your brain. Alternate some of your time with table tennis, pickle ball, carpet bowling or badminton.

Summer will be here soon when you can try Bocce ball outside on our new courts. Apparently, the entire town is invited to use this facility. Get involved with our Bocce seniors teams in a challenge against outside groups. If you don't know how to play, members will be happy to teach you when the weather clears and the courts open.

Exercise all avenues of your brain, not just one or two. You'll be surprised how quickly your thought processes will improve and how much better you'll feel about yourself.

Reconnect with your inner child, get curious and see what happens.