

# Your brain rocks

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Your brain is amazing. It acts like an air traffic controller in your head. Your brain helps you by:<sup>1</sup>

- Storing information from every single thing you do
- Forming links between your experiences to build complex memory maps
- Automatically using all the stored, mapped information to help you navigate new tasks

In other words, without you even trying, your brain “remembers” every event and activity in your life. Every smell, sound and sight is somewhere on your brain map. Every bit of data is used to help you find your way through your next challenge.

## The healthy brain: always growing and changing

Until the 1960s, scientists believed the brain could only change in infancy and childhood. They thought the brain was fully formed by the time we reached adulthood.

Today we know that’s not true. The healthy brain keeps making new “neural” pathways all through life. That’s why we can adjust to new situations, learn new things and make new memories at every age.<sup>2</sup>

## Giving back to your brain

Our brains do a lot for us. We can return the favor by taking steps to help keep our brains strong.

There are at least five keys to good brain function. They are:

- **Mental activity.** Remember the phrase, “Use it or lose it”? It’s true. You can help keep your brain sharp by doing things like:
  - Learning to play a musical instrument
  - Reading
  - Listening to music
  - Playing bridge, Scrabble® and other “thinking” games
  - Studying a foreign language
  - Taking an adult education course in a subject that’s new to you
  - Socializing to meet new people, learn and have fun
- **Exercise.** You need exercise for more than weight control or muscle tone. You need it for your brain’s sake. Studies show that physical fitness keeps your brain healthy. Adults who stay active are better at multi-tasking, remembering, planning and more.
- **Stress control.** Stress is harmful for your entire body — including your brain. Hormones released by stress can affect the brain over long periods of time. Stress can cloud your memory and judgment. To keep your brain healthy, practice stress management with deep breathing, meditation, yoga and other techniques.
- **Sleep.** A good night’s sleep is good medicine for brain health. Chronic lack of sleep can harm your ability to concentrate and learn. It can also lower your coping skills and even put you at greater risk for depression.
- **Healthy diet.** Some “superfoods” for brain health include blueberries, avocados, nuts and seeds, salmon, whole grains, pomegranate juice, beans, tea and — yes, candy lovers! — dark chocolate.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[www.brainfacts.org](http://www.brainfacts.org)

<sup>2</sup>[www.about.com](http://www.about.com)

<sup>3</sup>[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)