**[The Ten Habits of Highly Effective Brains](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2007/08/22/10-habits-of-highly-effective-brains/)**

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1. **[Learn](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2006/09/12/use-it-or-lose-it-what-is-it/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)** what is the “It” in “Use It or Lose It”. A basic under­stand­ing will serve you well to appre­ci­ate your brain’s beauty as a liv­ing and constantly-developing dense for­est with bil­lions of neu­rons and synapses.
2. Take care of your **[nutri­tion](http://www.sharpbrains.com/resources/2-the-4-pillars-of-brain-maintenance/nutrition-and-supplements-dhea-ginkgo-biloba-omega-3-separating-myth-from-fact/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**. Did you know that the brain only weighs 2% of body mass but con­sumes over 20% of the oxy­gen and nutri­ents we intake? As a gen­eral rule, you don’t need expen­sive ultra-sophisticated nutri­tional sup­ple­ments, just make sure you don’t stuff your­self with the “bad stuff”.
3. Remem­ber that the brain is part of the body. Things that **[exer­cise your body](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2010/10/04/fitter-bodies-fitter-brains-true-at-all-ages/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)** can also help sharpen your brain: phys­i­cal exer­cise enhances neurogenesis.
4. Prac­tice **[pos­i­tive, future-oriented thoughts](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2010/10/07/train-your-brain-to-focus-on-positive-experiences/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)** until they become your default mind­set and you look for­ward to every new day in a con­struc­tive way. Stress and anx­i­ety, no mat­ter whether induced by exter­nal events or by your own thoughts, actu­ally kills neu­rons and pre­vent the cre­ation of new You can think of chronic stress as the oppo­site of exer­cise: it pre­vents the cre­ation of new neurons.
5. Thrive on **[Learn­ing](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2010/10/12/the-benefits-of-speaking-more-than-one-language/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)** and **[Men­tal Chal­lenges](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2008/01/19/brain-games-and-cognitive-fitness-news-for-the-weekend/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**. The point of hav­ing a brain is pre­cisely to learn and to adapt to chal­leng­ing new envi­ron­ments. Once new neu­rons appear in your brain, where they stay in your brain and how long they sur­vive depends on how you use them. “Use It or Lose It” does not mean “do cross­word puz­zle num­ber 1,234,567″. It means, “chal­lenge your brain often with fun­da­men­tally new activities”.
6. We are (as far as we know) the only self-directed organ­isms in this planet. **[Aim high](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2010/10/14/work-helps-maintain-the-brain/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**. Once you grad­u­ate from col­lege, keep learn­ing. The brain keeps devel­op­ing, no mat­ter your age, and it reflects what you do with it.
7. **[Explore](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2006/09/21/brain-exercise-how-is-this-possible/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), travel**. Adapt­ing to new loca­tions forces you to pay more atten­tion to your envi­ron­ment. Make new deci­sions, use your brain.
8. **[Don’t Out­source Your Brain](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2008/02/26/brain-plasticity-how-learning-changes-your-brain/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**. Not to media per­son­al­i­ties, not to politi­cians, not to your smart neigh­bour… Make your own deci­sions, and mis­takes. And learn from them. That way, you are train­ing your brain, not your neighbour’s.
9. Develop and main­tain**[stim­u­lat­ing friend­ships](http://www.sharpbrains.com/resources/7-opening-the-debate/why-social-engagement-can-boost-brain-function-the-case-for-walking-book-clubs/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**. We are “social ani­mals”, and need social inter­ac­tion. Which, by the way, is why ‘Baby Ein­stein’ has been shown not to be the panacea for chil­dren development.
10. **[Laugh](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2007/03/18/brain-teaser-for-stress/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). Often**. Espe­cially to cog­ni­tively com­plex humor, full of twists and sur­prises. Bet­ter, try to become the next Jon Stewart.