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## Health



Photo by Dorian Caster;  
Illustration (below) by Jason Lee

### Smart Fitness

## Your Brain on Exercise

By Gabrielle deGroot Redford/Janet Kinoshian, March & April 2008

How breaking a sweat and doing yoga can make you smarter

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We all know that exercise is good for the body. Now, scientists are discovering it's good for the brain as well. In recent years researchers have found that exercise improves memory, concentration, and abstract reasoning among older adults, and may even delay the onset of Alzheimer's. It works like this: aerobic exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which nourishes brain cells and allows them to function more effectively—"kind of like making sure your engine is all tuned up," says Waneen Spirduso, Ed.D., a professor at the University of Texas at Austin and the author of [Exercise and Its Mediating Effects on Cognition](#) (Human Kinetics, 2007).

A recent study showed that exercise actually promotes the growth of new neurons (brain cells) in the hippocampus—the part of the brain that controls memory and learning. Scientists previously believed that once brain cells died, they were not replaced.

"You can get cognitive benefits with activity that is fairly simple, like walking for 20 minutes a day," says Spirduso.—*Gabrielle deGroot Redford*

### Mental Muscle?

*While yoga has long been shown to affect mood, one yoga move in particular is getting attention for boosting brainpower. Superbrain Yoga, as the exercise is called, is being practiced across the country as an antidote to brain drain. Go ahead. Try it!*

This simple move, shown at right, boosts brain function by stimulating acupressure points on the earlobes, according to Yale-trained neurobiologist Eugenius Ang, Ph.D.

### More On This Story

[Get Off the Couch!](#) (January & February 2008)

[Get Stronger, Live Longer: Illustrated Strength-Training Workouts](#) (May & June 2007)

[Special Report: You're Wiser Now](#) (September & October 2005)

[Yoga Basics](#) (AARP.org)

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**Mental Muscle?**

**Step 1** Place your left hand on your right earlobe, thumb on the front of the lobe with fingernail facing outward and second finger behind the earlobe. Then, with your right hand, grasp your left earlobe, again keeping your thumb on the front of the lobe, facing outward. Press both earlobes simultaneously, making sure your left arm is close to your chest and inside your right (which devotees say helps energy travel upward to the brain).

**Step 2** As you press on the earlobes, squat down, keeping your back straight. Do 10 to 12 deep bends, inhaling through the nose on the way down and exhaling through the mouth coming up. You may place a chair underneath you as a safety precaution.

**Step 3** Repeat daily. "It's like putting more gas in your brain's tank," says Ang. To learn more, read [Superbrain Yoga](#) by Master Choa Kok Sui.  
—Janet Kinoshian



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