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Spring Cleaning For Your Brain

by Brian Thwaites

I love the spring. Quite frankly, I find it difficult not to embrace a season whose signature qualities are rebirth, reawakening and renewal. I mean, it's certainly not a huge surprise that many of us find this time of year so enchanting.

We're packing away winter clothes, washing windows, cleaning up yards, waxing cars, organizing cupboards, emptying out closets and generally getting rid of clutter. And it feels good, doesn't it? Out with the old; in with the new!

But the spirit of spring cleaning isn't limited just to our homes. We're also suddenly in the mood to make other very positive changes in our daily lives, too. So we're getting outside more, jogging, walking dogs, going on hikes and riding bikes. Of course, all this activity is tremendously good for us, both physically and emotionally. And, significantly, it's especially beneficial for us mentally as well.

The 'brain fitness' movement has grown to become a multi-billion dollar industry with a profusion of commercially available self-help programs, manuals, books and videos. We're doing crosswords, solving Sudoku puzzles, playing computer games, and even taking 'smart' pills in an effort to keep our brains engaged and firing on all cylinders --- all this, of course, in the hope that we'll not only maintain our current levels of mental fitness, but will actually use our heads even better as we age. Older and wiser! Woo-hoo!

Well, here's some awfully interesting news from the world of brain research: As hopeful as we are that these activities will markedly change our lives, and as stimulating as these pursuits potentially may be, neuroscientists are now telling us that there is, in fact, a kind of magic bullet that's pretty well guaranteed to both benefit our brains in the present and continue to improve them in the future. And even better news? It's an idea that neither has to cost us much money nor take up a lot of our time. And this simple yet amazing discovery is engage in physical activity.

That's right, we need to get moving and be more active. Since the brain takes up about 2% of a body's mass yet requires around 20% of its oxygen, any form of exercise that stimulates oxygen flow is bound to have a dramatic impact on our mental processes.

So this is the perfect time to brush away those cobwebs inside our heads and rejuvenate our brains. Happy spring cleaning!