

from **Speakers' Spotlight Blog** • January 2014

Caring For Your Post-Holiday Brain

Well that was fun.

So many things to do and so many places to go and so many people to see in what never seemed to be quite enough time. And now that the busy holiday season has come to an end, many of us are well, exhausted.

Quite aside from the physical toll of all that activity on our bodies, the megaton of extra *thinking* we had to do was pretty tiring, too, wasn't it? So, with a new year now upon us, here are some tips to help ease our brains into 2014:

Eat - This is a good time to simplify our meals a tad. After consuming what may well have been an excess of rich, fancy foods (hands up if you indulged once or twice over the holidays!), some lighter fare is now in order for the next little while. David Perlmutter, the author of *Grain Brain*, suggests that, although a Mediterranean diet — fish, olive oil, whole grains, nuts, vegetables, fruit — has been demonstrated to be quite heart-healthy, that same food *minus gluten* (e.g. whole grains) seems to be even more beneficial for the brain. Might be worth a try, even just for the first few weeks of the year.

Sleep - Neuroscientists say that having too little sleep can result in a significant loss of grey matter. In fact, many recent studies are suggesting not only that lack of sleep fills our brains with 'gunk', but that it can actually have the same effect as being hit on the head! The brain needs sleep to cleanse itself of toxins, so making an effort to get more shut-eye will help free some space up there.

Move - Our brains occupy around 2% of our mass, but require 20% of our oxygen. Physical exercise not only energizes our bodies; it actually helps grow new brain cells (through a process called neurogenesis) and may even help slow down the onset of diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Going to the gym appeals to some people, but simply taking a brisk daily walk will provide plenty of benefits, too.

Chill - The flurry of busyness over the past several weeks makes January a good time to find plenty of opportunities to relax, as well. For some of us, that means making some time just for ourselves to enjoy a little bit of peace and quiet. For others, it might mean doing some more socializing, but in a more leisurely fashion than took place during the holidays. Either way, it's important to understand that engaging in activities that reduce stress and help us unwind is an essential key to mental well-being.

So ... eat, sleep, move and chill — and all the best for a happy and brain-healthy year ahead!