

Get Smarter

**8 POWERFUL
HACKS TO BOOST YOUR
BRAINPOWER**

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INGORTHAND/GETTY IMAGES

Guess what? Staying on top of your academic game requires more than just focusing in class and studying harder: It's all about taking care of your brain, too.

Why? Experts say your noggin actually continues to develop until you're well into your 20s—much later than was previously thought. Meaning you've got a good window of time to develop habits now that'll make your brain function faster in the future. How to do just that? Try these genius tricks to nail everything from speedier study sessions to mega memory boosts. Brilliant!

1. START MONO-TASKING

Much to the dismay of busy babes everywhere, neuroscientists across the board agree that the brain still can do only one thing at a time really well. Which means that mastering multitasking is, TBH, a myth. Increase concentration by doing homework in a quiet, distraction-free zone (no Netflix in the background, please). If you can't stand the silence, cue up a chill Spotify playlist (anything that puts you in a good mood brings the best bennies).

Your new goal is mono-tasking: the art of concentrating on just one task—or subject—at a time. When you've ticked one box off your to-do list, move to the next. Lost your place or got distracted? Set a timer for two minutes and close your eyes to reset your mind.

2. WRITE IT OUT

It's super easy to fall into the trap of tapping out all your reminders into the Notes app on your phone. But studies show the physical act of putting pen to paper better engages the memory centers of your brain—especially when it comes to list-making.

So instead of setting calendar reminders for your homework assignments, logging all your endless to-do's in the Todoist app and typing up your study guides in Google Docs, grab a pretty pen (or four) and your fave notebook. Once you write things down, you'll be much more likely to actually recall your entries from memory. (Check out our bullet journal inspo at girlslife.com/iti.)

3. TAKE A TECH TIMEOUT

Smartphones are amazing for many reasons: You can instantly connect with your friends, you're always entertained and you never get lost. But our dependence on devices may be damaging to our brains in the long run. "Spending lots of time on smartphones and computers can make us irritable, unfocused, anxious and forgetful," says child psychologist and nutrition specialist Dr. Nicole Beurkens.

Which is why it's super important to help your brain reset by taking screen breaks throughout the day. Start by putting away your phone during meals (yep, that's three times a day). Leave it in another room so it's totally out of sight—and out of mind.

For a serious screentime detox, download an app like Flipd (flipd-app.co), which lets you lock your phone for a set period of time. For a less drastic move, try Freedom (freedom.to), which blocks certain sites for a bit so you can't, you know, spend two aimless hours in an Instagram rabbit hole.

4. NIX NOTIFICATIONS

Another simple step to scaling back screen time? Silence those notifications. Recent research shows that we're actually addicted to those chimes and dings, as they set off a dopamine loop that keeps us wanting and needing more stimulation and instant gratification.

So when you're studying or really need to focus, turn off your Instagram updates,



news alerts and text notifications. If you cut the tether to your tech temporarily, your brain will have a fighting chance at maintaining focus and thinking deeply.

5. SNOOZE SMART

Here's one way to get smarter overnight: Sleep more! Experts say that a good night's rest can rev up your memory and allow your brain to process information more efficiently.

And if you stay up 'til the wee hours? You'll be more foggy and groggy, not to mention stressing and having a tougher time concentrating the next day, says Dr. Carolyn Dean, brain health expert and author of *365 Ways to Boost Your Brain Power: Tips, Exercise, Advice*. Just be sure you're getting the recommended amount. Your goal: Nine to 10 hours nightly is what you should be aiming for, even (and especially) on weekdays.

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DRINK UP

The brain is incredibly sensitive to dehydration—even slightly below-normal water intake can result in feeling dizzy, foggy, headachey or fatigued—so make sure you're getting your daily 8x8 (eight glasses of 8 ounces of H₂O).



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Our favorite sleep hack? Rock those cozy socks. Seriously, though: The National Sleep Foundation says that wearing socks at night can help you fall asleep faster. Weirdly, warm tootsies signal to the brain that it's bedtime.

6. BLOCK BLUE LIGHT

If you often lie awake at night wondering why you can't fall asleep, blue light may be to blame. That's the high-energy wavelength emitted by screens and electronic devices (and also the sun), and it's known to keep your brain alert at night by blocking melatonin, the hormone that makes you sleepy. Turn down the bright stuff in your bedroom by powering down your phone and computer every evening, or leaving them in another room altogether.

And during the day? Install a blue light blocking app like f.lux. And even if you don't

wear glasses, look into picking up a pair with blue light blocking lenses, like the ones from Felix Gray (shopfelixgray.com).

7. GET DIFFUSING

Essential oil aromatherapy can be, uh, essential to your mental health. How? A whiff of these super-powered scents can affect your brain chemistry and lead to improved clarity, says holistic health coach Jessica Rosen.

Dab a couple drops on a handkerchief or use a diffuser in your room (we like Ellia Dream Ultrasonic Essential Oil Diffuser, \$30, ellia.com). Try eucalyptus, peppermint or cinnamon for an amazing energy kick.

Need a major mood-boost? Go for orange, bergamot, grapefruit or lemon. Big test tomorrow? Look to rosemary and patchouli to work their magic on your memory and increase focus.

8. MOVE YOUR MUSCLES

That sweat sesh won't just make you feel fab—it can make you more intelligent, too. A first-of-its-kind study released in January by Columbia University professor of neuropsychology Dr. Yaakov Stern shows that daily exercise helps with critical thinking, decision-making and memory retention.

Personal trainer Olyvia DuSold says the key to brain-boosting benefits is switching things up: Rather than sticking to the same fitness routine, try new workouts and activities that challenge your brain to form new connections. Sports like rock climbing and classes like yoga require you to constantly think through new problems and poses. More of a runner? Try hitting the trail to create new movement patterns as you go from point A to point B. The bottom line: Try a new thing...your brain will thank you for it. **PH**

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

NOSH YOUR WAY TO A SHARPER NOGGIN



IF YOU NEED TO:
MEMORIZE FRENCH CONJUGATIONS
EAT Spinach
Packed with folate, which helps funnel blood to the brain, spinach has been shown to boost cognitive function and memory.



IF YOU NEED TO:
GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP BEFORE THE PSAT
EAT Pumpkin seeds
These magnesium-rich snacks naturally maximize melatonin for a deep and restorative snooze.



IF YOU NEED TO:
PLOW THROUGH YOUR CALC HOMEWORK
EAT Avocado
Packing a hefty dose of brain-friendly compounds, avocados can help you process information faster.



IF YOU NEED TO:
RECALL YOUR MONOLOGUE FOR THE SPRING PLAY AUDITIONS
EAT Eggs
Choline and cholesterol, both found in eggs, play a key role in your brain's memory and information retention.



IF YOU NEED TO:
ACE THE CLASS DEBATE
EAT Salmon
Rich in omega-3 fatty acids (the brain's building blocks), this pink fish is the ultimate brain food. Aim for two servings of wild-caught salmon weekly to help balance your mood and think more clearly. Not into seafood dinners? Consider a fish oil supplement such as Nordic Naturals Ultimate Omega 2X Teen (\$30, amazon.com).



IF YOU NEED TO:
DELIVER YOUR SGA SPEECH
EAT Berries
Blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and goji berries are incredibly high in antioxidants, which help keep your mind sharp and are a healthy source of glucose (aka brain fuel).



IF YOU NEED TO:
FIND FOCUS IN A LATE-NIGHT STUDY SESH
EAT Dark chocolate
Theobromine, an antioxidant found in cocoa, improves blood flow to the brain (similar to caffeine, but sans jitters). Look for chocolate that's at least 70% cocoa. Try Hu Hazelnut Butter Dark Chocolate (4 for \$25, hukitchen.com).