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## Keep Your Mind Active to Better Handle Stress

Keeping your mind active and engaged can actually help us handle stress better! This is the case for people of all ages, but becomes more important for older adults.

There is evidence to show that cognitive fitness and reserves are important to adapt to what life may throw at you. According to Gilkey and Kilts in their *Harvard Business Review* article, stated the more cognitively fit you are, the better equipped you are to make decisions, solve problems, and deal with stress and change. It helps you be open to new ideas, capacity to change behavior and even realize goals.

Research suggests that mind stimulating activities may protect the brain by establishing 'cognitive reserves'. Harvard Health describes cognitive reserve as your brain's ability to improvise and find alternate ways of getting a job done. Your brain can change the way it operates and thus make added resources available to cope with challenges. Research has shown that people with greater cognitive reserve are better able to stave off symptoms of degenerative brain changes associated with dementia or other brain diseases, such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, or a stroke. Cognitive reserve is developed by a lifetime of education and curiosity to help your brain better cope with any failures or declines it faces.

When you increase your reserve by completing stimulating activities, you are increasing your ability to handle stress down the road. Simple activities can keep your mind active and can provide joy and meaning to life. Here are a few *Mind-Stimulating Exercises* to choose from and enjoy!

- Learn to play a musical instrument
- Play Scrabble, other board games, or cards
- Work crossword puzzles, word searches or other brain-teasers
- Start a new hobby or revisit an old one, such as painting, biking, bird-watching, gardening or quilting
- Learn a foreign language
- Read, both silently and aloud (it works different parts of the brain)

- Write your life story, or write someone else's story
- Make up your own list of proverbs
- Plan a surprise for someone
- Do math problems in your head or on paper before using a calculator
- Memorize poems, verses, jokes or songs
- Try to do something new and different every day
- Play jacks, pick-up sticks or carefully cut out pictures from old magazines. (Eye-hand coordination activities stimulate parts of the brain that may not have been challenged lately.)
- Breathe deeply; use total lung capacity
- Write, draw, brush your teeth or do other tasks with your less-dominant hand. Write with both hands at the same time
- Spell words backwards

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