

Optimise Your Brain Health NOW

Discover how to get the most out
of your brain from a leading
Neuroscientist & Clinical
Psychologist

Dr Desiree Dickerson





Dr Desiree Dickerson, PREKURE's resident psychologist and world-renowned academic, helps you understand how to optimise brain health. It's easy to get sucked down rabbit holes and be led to believe we need 101 supplements to support brain health as we age, but this simply isn't the case. Read on as she shares her top tips to optimise your brain health today for yourself, your family or your clients.

When we talk about brain health and optimising it, we are talking about protecting our brain structure and function as we age. There are lifestyle tools we can use to help prevent brain diseases. As much as function and prevention of disease are important, we also want to be in a space where we are flourishing not languishing and these lifestyle tools can help support both brain and mental health for everyone, no matter where you are at in your journey towards incorporating mind-body medicine into your life. Below, Desiree shares her top 6 tips for optimising brain health. They are low cost, low tech and achievable for everyone.

1 Incorporate mental activity into your day

Using our brain and learning helps massively in keeping our brain healthy. Stimulate and challenge your brain through complex mental activity. Basically, our brain is a 'use it or lose it' muscle. Doing mentally stimulated tasks and activities helps to build neural networks in the brain. Include a puzzle, brain teaser or crossword into your morning routine to challenge your brain and get those neurons firing first thing in the morning.

2 Exercise daily

The closest thing we have to a silver bullet. The cognitive function of people who exercise is significantly higher when compared to non-exercisers – sometimes over 7 times greater [1]. Exercise helps produce brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) which helps improve brain plasticity [2]. Get more exercise into your life to support your brain health.

3 Socialise often

Socialising is quality brain food. Get out and about, see and interact with people! If it isn't hauora/wellbeing for ourselves and others we are striving for, then what is it? This is the question posed by the researchers behind the Sovereign Wellbeing Index – New Zealand's first measure of wellbeing. Wellbeing is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Sustainable wellbeing refers to lives that are going well. The way we choose to think and act has a huge impact on our personal wellbeing. Of the 10,000 New Zealanders studied, those with the highest levels of wellbeing, were those who:

- Were socially connected with others
- Gave their time and resources to others
- Were able to appreciate and take notice of things around them
- Were continually learning new things in their lives
- Were physically active

Take a moment to think about what this looks like in your life. Do you give yourself enough time to stop and appreciate the things in your life that give you joy? Are there new things you'd like to try or learn more about? What could you do to cultivate your social networks?

The PREKURE Connect Guidelines

Here at PREKURE we believe so strongly in the power of social connection that we have created guidelines to help you build more of it into your life.

- 1 Having a social network requires active work and giving of your time and resources. Everyone, especially you, benefits from this, but you must give.
- 2 Cherish your friends and hang out with your mates more.
- 3 Be interested in other people. Ask them questions.
- 4 Never underestimate who you are talking to.
- 5 Be kind whenever possible...it's always possible.
- 6 Smile, listen, say thank you.



4 Sleep well

The optimal amount of sleep, as shown by a recent study on 3,760 people over seven years, is 7.8 hours per night for men and 7.6 hours for women. The amount people sleep these days is less than in previous generations, largely due to our busy lives. Not getting enough sleep can have a negative health impact including increased risk of obesity and chronic disease. Sleep deprivation can stimulate appetite and cravings. It can also cause you to develop insulin resistance, which in turn means you are less able to tolerate carbohydrate foods. Sleep needs to be placed in the priority queue for a healthy lifestyle.

This might mean a little less TV, or switching your light off a little earlier than normal.



If you get a good night's sleep and wake up refreshed and ready to go, then and only then are you set for an awesome day and eventually an awesome life.

The main reason sleep is so important is because our brain sorts stuff while we are sleeping. It rewires, it forms memories (deep sleep) and it solves problems and gets things sorted out (dream sleep). The body might be quiet but the brain is not. Because we don't live in nature like we used to, and we have artificial light during the day and after dark, our brain gets a bit confused. The hormones which control our sleep are high when they shouldn't be and not high enough when they should be. The simple biological facts are that a lack of sleep impairs brain function. Not enough sleep decreases learning, impairs performance in cognitive tests, and prolongs reaction time. Some have compared the acute effects of sleep deprivation to an impaired cognitive state similar to being drunk. One important mechanism of sleep appears to be to remove toxic waste products through the cerebrospinal fluid. One toxin is beta-amyloid which is best known for its role in Alzheimer's Disease.

Quick tips for getting a good night's sleep:

- Routine is crucial. Go to bed and get up at similar times each day - you can't make up for a week of bad sleep on the weekend.
- Avoid alcohol. One of the main reasons is that alcohol turns off dream sleep.
- Avoid caffeine
- Try not to fall asleep on the couch in the early evening
- Avoid blue light in the evening and keep digital devices out of the bedroom. Especially for kids!

5 Meditate regularly

Meditation is not about 'zoning out' as many people tend to think. Meditation is a practice where we build an awareness of the present moment and allow thoughts, feelings, sensations and emotions to come and go as they please without judgement and without becoming hooked or attached to them. Think of meditation like sitting by a stream and watching the leaves and debris pass you by. The leaves and debris are like your feelings and thoughts. Reducing your emotional reactivity and your stress response decreases the amount of time the brain spends bathing in cortisol.

When our brain is overexposed to cortisol the hippocampus becomes damaged. Research shows that meditation can help reduce stress, enhance focus and help us become less emotionally reactive [3]. In an increasingly busy world, where many people battle with focus and stress, this seems like a bit of a no-brainer to meditate to protect and support your brain health. [Here is a link](#) to an excellent 'leaves on a stream' meditation exercise that you can use to help you build your meditation practice.

6 Eat a diet rich in whole unprocessed foods

Ultra-processed foods don't contain the right amount of key nutrients we need to support overall health and especially brain health. Consuming whole, unprocessed foods is a great way to ensure we are setting ourselves up to get all the key nutrients we need and support stable blood sugar which is a key for long term brain health. Research shows that those with consistently elevated blood glucose levels are more likely to be diagnosed with neurodegenerative diseases like dementia [4]. [Listen to this podcast](#) with PREKURE's Chief Science Officer Prof Grant Schofield where he explores the potential mechanisms behind this finding.



Follow PREKURE's food guidelines to set yourself up to eat a diet that will support your physical and mental health.

PREKURE's food guidelines

At PREKURE, we believe it's critical that our outdated and ineffective dietary guidelines are overhauled to a model that is evidence-based and backed by science to lead to superior health outcomes.

Our PREKURE food guidelines are simple:

1. Enjoy nutritious foods every day that are whole and unprocessed.

- Choose vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, seafood, poultry, organ meats, dairy, nuts, seeds and legumes (as tolerated).
- Favour traditional oils fats and spreads over refined and processed versions.
- Keep total sugar – especially added sugar – to a minimum in all foods and drinks.

2. Make the majority of your purchases foods that don't come in packages. If you do buy packaged foods, choose items with less than 5 ingredients.

3. Choose mostly locally-grown food.

4. Choose ethically-sourced food where possible.

5. Plan your time to make food and eating important in your life.

6. Prepare, cook and eat minimally processed traditional foods with family, friends and your community.

7. Eat your meals slowly and consciously with no distractions.

8. Enjoy treats on special occasions and without guilt.

9. Keep well hydrated: drink water mainly and other drinks with minimal added sugar.

10. Keep more than half of your week alcohol free. Don't drink alcohol if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

Prevention is Cure. Lifestyle is Medicine.

PREKURE is a health education & training provider championing a Lifestyle Medicine Movement. Our society spends billions on sickness and very little on health. It's time we changed our 'medicine'. We see a new world of medicine as preventative, customer-centric and future-focussed. One where people thrive, not just survive.

Are you with us?

The current health system is failing sufferers of chronic disease - we need passionate people to help solve the problem. By studying with us you can help yourself and others to make the critical lifestyle changes required to dramatically improve health and wellbeing.

Together we can change medicine for good. Learn more at prekure.com

Do you want to cut through all the nonsense and understand how to support your mental health and incorporate mind-body medicine into your life?

In our PK104 Mental Health & Mind-Body Medicine short course we cover the fields of neuroscience, brain health, mental health and wellbeing and arm you with practical tips and tricks to help you, your family or your clients stay in peak mental condition. Getting enough sleep is fundamental to good health. In this course, you'll learn about the science of sleep, as well as gaining the practical know-how to help your clients get a better quality and quantity of it. You'll also examine stress and what happens to the body when stress becomes distress, as well as learning what's meant by "mental ill-health" and how best to treat it.



It's just such high quality training with high quality teachers!

— Donna, PK104 Student





PK104 Prevention is Cure | Mental Health & Mind-Body Medicine

Prevention is Cure | Lifestyle is Medicine

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