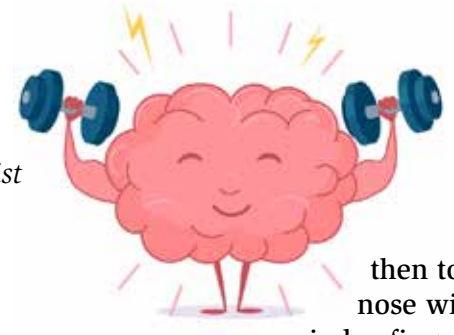




# Brain Exercises

by Kathy K. Sato, Licensed Acupuncturist



There are many ways of honing your mental sharpness and helping your brain stay healthy. You could work on jigsaw puzzles, listen or play music, learn a new language, use your nondominant hand or even socialize.

Doctors often use specific neurological exams to assess the integrity of the central nervous system. One could take these same neurological exams and use them to exercise or to rehabilitate specific areas of the brain.

Here are three brain exercises to try:

◆ **Index finger-thumb tapping: examines motor function.** One hand at a time, tap the index finger on the thumb as fast and as big as possible, separating the digits as wide as possible before tapping. This will help exercise the motor area.

◆ **Finger-to-nose test: assesses coordination.** Extend your arms straight out to your sides and

then touch the tip of your nose with the tip of your index finger. Alternate hands. This exercise can help with cerebellar deficiencies—balance issues or essential tremors.

◆ **Rapid alternating movements exam: helps with cerebellar issues.** One hand at a time, rapidly and repeatedly flip your hand from the palm-up to the palm-down position.

If you find doing these exercises difficult, more reason to do them. The more you do them, the more neuro-pathways can be reinforced, helping your brain (and body) to stay healthy! ■

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# Proper Use of a Foam Roller

by Julie Moon, Physical Therapist

The popularity of the foam roller has been growing so steadily in the world of fitness that it is often used as a cure-all for many different conditions. It is a great tool for increasing mobility of the spine and soft tissue if used correctly. If it's not used the right way, you could be doing more harm than good.

If you are rolling your lumbar spine (lower back), stop! Although the thoracic spine (middle back) is supported by the strong ribcage, the lumbar spine is not, which makes it more unstable. Forcing the lower back into more extension may cause more issues, increasing pain and sometimes causing stress fractures. But targeting the thoracic area and the region between your shoulder blades will improve mobility and overall posture.

You will block the thoracic spine with your shoulder blades if you clasp your hands behind



your head, so expose the spine by reaching out, crossing your wrists and rounding the shoulders. Relax your abs, drop your butt and sink into the foam roller. Gently roll the tight spot, rocking side to side. Slowly bring your arms back over your head to get a great stretch. ■

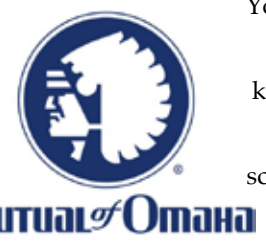
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