



## ASK THE SOCIAL WORKER: IMPROVING BRAIN FUNCTION

**Question:** My father wants to buy a brain fitness computer program that costs around \$500. His retirement facility has the program installed on a computer in the recreation room, but he can't use it as often as he likes. Are these programs really effective in improving brain function?

**Answer:** Your father is among a growing number of consumers who are interested in purchasing brain fitness programs for their personal computers. Unfortunately, while research shows that exercising your brain can maintain or improve your cognitive performance, experts continue to debate the effectiveness of brain fitness software. SharpBrains, a research and consulting company for the brain fitness market, has created a 10 question checklist to help consumers select products or services that make claims related to brain performance. The list, which is available [www.sharpbrains.com](http://www.sharpbrains.com), will help you decide if the computer program your father wants to purchase will improve his brain function.

Your father's interest in keeping his brain stimulated is a very positive step toward maintaining and improving his brain's health. I suggest you let your father know that staying mentally active is just one of four brain-healthy lifestyles that improves brain fitness and decreases the risk of dementia. Inform your father about the following brain-healthy lifestyles and encourage him to practice them daily.

- Eat wisely: A low-fat, low-cholesterol diet will decrease the risk of stroke and brain cell damage. Dark green vegetables and fruits that contain antioxidants will also protect brain cells.
- Stay physically active: The flow of blood to the brain, which is essential for brain health, is maintained by physical exercise.
- Keep mentally active: Stimulating activities strengthen brain cells and the connections between them.
- Remain socially involved: Socializing often enhances mental and physical activities, there by reducing stress and maintaining healthy brain cells.

The Alzheimer's Association publishes a free booklet, "Maintain Your Brain," that includes lots of facts about brain health, including these four brain-healthy lifestyles. The booklet can be printed from their Web site at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) or ordered by calling (800) 272-3900.

Sources: "Aging Well," Summer 2008, Vol.1 No. 3; SharpBrains, [www.sharpbrains.com](http://www.sharpbrains.com); Alzheimer's Association, [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org).

## JOKE OF THE MONTH

**"If bankers can count, how come they always have ten windows and two tellers!"**

— *Milton Berle's Private Joke File*

Laughter is known to boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, burn calories and release pleasure-inducing chemicals in the brain.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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## STEP UP TO BETTER HEALTH: THE WALKING PROGRAM THAT GETS EVERYONE MOVING!



For a number of years AARP has offered “Step Up to Better Health,” an online step counting program that motivates the public to walk more and enjoy an active lifestyle. There is no age requirement to participate in this free program and AARP membership is not required. Participants wear a

step counter for ten weeks and record the number of daily steps they take along one of four online trails. The goal is to increase each participant’s daily steps to 10,000 steps per day over the course of the program.

The purpose behind tracking daily steps is to show participants that their daily step count, usually 2,000-4,000 steps, is far below the healthier 10,000 daily

count. Research results show that people who achieve 10,000 steps a day lower their risk for many chronic conditions, such as heart disease, some cancers, diabetes, obesity and also improve their energy level, mood and sleep.

Just wearing a step counter has helped participants to add about 2,000 steps to their day. Those who reach 5,000-6,000 steps will often walk or run 2-3 miles to reach the suggested 10,000 daily steps.

By joining “Step Up to Better Health” today, you may improve your health over a lifetime! You can purchase a step counter for just \$9.00 while registering at [www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com](http://www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com) or by calling (800) 861-0168.

Source: Step Up to Better Health, [www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com](http://www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com)

## NEW ADDITIONS TO THE MPPAF’S NATIONAL RESOURCE DIRECTORY

### **Children of Aging Parents (CAPS): [www.caps4caregivers.org](http://www.caps4caregivers.org), (800) 227-7294**

This non-profit organization assists caregivers of the elderly and chronically ill with information, resources and referrals to support groups. CAPS also publishes a quarterly newsletter and hosts an on-line support group.

### **Caring Connections: [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org), (800) 658-8898**

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, a non-profit organization representing hospice and palliative care organizations and professionals, oversees the Caring Connections program. The public can access state-specific advance directives, a hospice locator and end-of-life publications at the Caring Connection’s Web site.

### **2nd Chance 4 Pets: [www.2ndchance4pets.org](http://www.2ndchance4pets.org)**

The mission of this non-profit organization, staffed by volunteers, is to protect pets from becoming orphaned due to their owner’s disability or death. Information about lifetime care solutions for pet care and supportive resources can be found at the organization’s Web site.



### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“You know there ought to be some kind of a star given to any woman that can live with a comedian.”

— Will Rogers

### QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Call Karen Wiener, Manager of Social Services at (888) 994-3863, ext. 2390, or write to [karen@wrmail.org](mailto:karen@wrmail.org).