



Wellness Week 2019

Intellectual Wellness and the Life of the Mind

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It is common these days to see articles or news reports that talk about how important it is to exercise, eat right and get enough sleep. These are all associated with maintaining health and vitality throughout one's lifetime. These in concert with a mindfulness strategy such as meditation have been shown to reduce stress and promote longevity. But, as we move towards a better understanding of human wellness, we are also challenged to think more about what we can do to maintain intellectual vitality.

Intellectual vitality pertains to maintaining mental dexterity through reflectivity and active curiosity and applies most cogently to initiating the exploration of new ideas and avenues of interest (Alamour, 2018). Teachers and students are strategically positioned to maintain intellectual vitality because both are continuously engaged in learning processes. The cognitive stimulation that comes from the kind of learning that occurs in academic spaces may directly relate to maintaining an active, vital mind. At the same time, learning outside of an academic setting can allow one to enjoy the cognitive benefits of learning without the demands of academic performance.

Here are a few great ways to enjoy a lifetime of intellectual vitality.

1. Read – This may seem obvious and for teachers and students the questions may be: How do I find time to read? And, what beyond what I already read for work or school should I reading? The idea here is to read something interesting to you that is unrelated to teaching or schoolwork. A great way to do this is to listen to audiobooks so that the “reading” can happen during other activities, like exercise. A really great book can be like a vacation for the mind. The anticipation and satisfaction of a really good book may prompt you to want to look for the next enjoyable mental vacation

destination. A great website for audio books is www.audible.com.

2. Memorize and share 1 joke a day – Laughing releases dopamine, a chemical associated with pleasure sensors in the brain (Yim, 2016). Laughing in a social setting intensifies this feel-good effect. So, learning a joke and then sharing it is a great strategy because it combines learning with humor and social interaction. There are websites that offer situationally specific jokes that are suitable for the workplace/professional environments, family gatherings etc. So, consider learning a few jokes that are appropriate for different social settings. [Here is a great website to get you started](#).
3. Escape Rooms – Escape rooms have become increasingly popular on the last 5 years. The basic premise of an escape room is that you alone or with a group are locked into a themed room with about an hour to figure out a way to escape. Clues around the room assist you with freeing yourself from the room before the time runs out. This kind of activity combines sensory stimulation (i.e. sight, sounds etc.) and puzzle solving skills with social engagement and (hopefully) fun. Themes may range from a Game of Thrones challenge to zombie apocalypse scenarios and rooms may be scheduled around personal events (i.e. anniversaries, birthdays etc.) Look for escape room facilities near you. And if the idea of being locked in a room with others (friends or strangers) trying to escape a zombie apocalypse is not your idea of fun, try puzzles (ex. Rubik's cubes, word puzzles etc.) as they operate on the same (albeit less intense) premise.

Learn a Skill: Skill development is one the best ways to keep your mind active. A few that are particularly noted for enhancing mental acuity are, speaking a foreign language, playing a musical instrument, painting or carpentry.

In sum, experiencing lifelong intellectual vitality is about stepping outside of one's comfort zone, exploring new interests and combining curiosity with activities that are engaging and fun. Enjoy!

Alamour, R. (2018). Understanding Intellectual Vitality. Retrieved from <https://www.transizion.com/understanding-intellectual-vitality-importance/>.

Yim, J. (2016). Therapeutic Benefits of Laughter in Mental Health: A Theoretical Review. *Tohoku J Exp Med*. July. Vol. 3:243-9. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27439375>.