

Intellectual Wellness

Intellect is more than just “smartness.” Being well in the intellectual dimension also involves recognizing our creative abilities, finding ways to expand our knowledge and skills, and discovering the potential for sharing our gifts with others.



We need to focus on lifelong learning, using what we learn, and sharing the knowledge that we have. The intellectual dimension can be activated through a wide array of activities, like setting aside time regularly to pursue personal interests; reading books, magazines, and newspapers; and keeping up on current issues and ideas.

Importance of Intellectual Wellness

Intellectual wellness is just as critical as physical wellness. As you get older it’s important to try and stay sharp. Exercising the brain is as important as exercising the body. Many physicians say that people who keep their minds more active seem to be less likely to end up with cognitive impairments such as Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. A possible explanation is that using your brain constantly sharpens the brain, as opposed to mindlessly watching television or not staying engaged in conversations.

An article¹ from *Smithsonian Magazine* discusses the benefits of reading as opposed to watching television. “Reading gives our brains a workout because comprehending text requires more mental energy than, for example, processing an image on a television screen. Reading exercises our working memory, which actively processes and stores new information as it comes.” Your brain is like any other muscle in your body. If you want to keep it in great shape you have to exercise it. And how do you exercise your brain? By reading, playing chess, keeping up with current events and engaging people in thoughtful and intellectual conversations.

Back to School

September marks the return of school. While you may not be going back to school yourself, use this month as an opportunity to learn something new. Maybe you could join a book club or take an art class. These activities help to keep your mind active and allow you to get out, socialize, discover new things, and become a lifelong learner.

School can aid in your journey towards intellectual wellness because learning new things helps you to so you can discover and share your talents. If you’ve already finished your education, perhaps you can look into taking a class at your local college. You don’t even necessarily have to take an academic class. Maybe you could try taking a yoga class or a swim class. Check in your local community to see who offers free swim or yoga classes. Or try volunteering. You can’t improve your intellectual wellness by being stagnant! Go out and try new things.

Fall Activities

There are a lot of fun fall activities for you to enjoy including going to a pumpkin patch, hayride, or corn maze. Pumpkins are the symbol of the fall, so why not go and pick out a pumpkin to add to your home? Take a trip to the country and check out the leaves changing color. You can make a day of it. Drive up or take a bus or train and find someplace that has many fall activities. You can also go for a hike. Take in the scenery and enjoy all that fall has to offer. These activities are fun and inexpensive. Take advantage of all the fun activities that the fall has to offer. After all, the fall is a reminder of the winter creeping up on us. Enjoy the crisp fall air while you can!



An Apple a Day Keeps the Doctor Away

September is the beginning of apple season. Why not take a trip to an apple orchard and pick some apples? A lot of apple farms have fresh apple cider, apple cider donuts, and apple pie. There is something really special about going to an apple orchard and picking your own apples. Apple picking can also lead to another great hobby—cooking. Find a recipe for apple pie or applesauce and try it out yourself.

Socialize

The simplest way to socialize is to engage in conversations with people. Don't suffer from FOMA (fear of missing out)! Go and try new things and keep your brain sharp and alert. It will help keep you on your toes.

Strike up a conversation with someone and try and learn from them. You might not always agree with them but that's okay. There is something to be learned from everyone even if it's what NOT to do. Try to see both sides of an issue and, if you don't know all that much about it, then ask questions. Find ways to research topics in order to learn new information.

Expressive Writing

The events and emotions from our life's experiences are stored away in our memories. Whether it is a happy childhood memory that makes you smile, or a sad one that makes you cry, they are all there. Some get pushed to the back of the memory file and avoided. If one of these happens to surface, we quickly shove it back down where we think it belongs. One researcher, Dr James Pennebaker, from the University of Texas, Austin, has been studying the effects of bringing those challenging emotions right to the forefront.²

Some research participants were asked to write about very traumatic experiences; others were given instructions to write about something superficial.

Those who wrote about their traumatic experience are told to really let go and dive deep into their emotions, relationships with friends and family, and the event itself.

The instructions were to write for a certain amount of time every day, for four days, and not to worry about spelling and grammar, just to sit down and start writing. The studies concluded that, once people have written about these experiences, the majority not only felt better mentally, but went to the doctor less, got sick less often, and improved their immune function, and boosted their overall physical health.

One of our regular contributors, Maureen Bodnar,³ took this idea for a test drive. Here's what she found:

First, I searched the "forbidden" file in the back of my memory, the one I do not allow myself to think about; then I began to write. I let myself go back to that time in my life and put it down on paper. The recollection made me upset and I began to cry. It was as if I had gone back, that no time had passed, and I was there all over again. So, I stopped for the day, and pulled myself together. But something strange happened—for the first time, I did not stuff it away again. There it was, on my mind and, though I was not altogether OK with that, it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.

The next day, I picked up where I left off, with the same flood of emotions. They were not the same, though. I was almost angry that I had let them live in my memory for so long, ashamed that they were there and trying to hide them from myself. As I continued for the next few days, I explored how this event had affected my life, my marriage, and my relationships with my family.

I can't say for certain that my physical health has improved, but I do feel better physically, since I no longer have this cloud looming over me. The event still happened and I still have to live with it. The difference is, now I can begin to take the steps on being OK with it. I decided to keep writing every day in a journal, recording my emotions instead of carrying them around with me like I have done in the past. It is not going to be an overnight fix, but with time and effort, I can say I feel optimistic that I will begin to heal and move toward a more open future.



Self-Assessment

Intellectual wellness involves recognizing our creative abilities and finding ways to expand our knowledge and skills through lifelong learning, using what we learn, and sharing the knowledge and gifts that we have with others.

Rate each item below using this scale:

4 If the item is **Always True** for you

3 If the item is **Sometimes True** for you

2 If the item is **Rarely True** for you

1 If the item is **Never True** for you

___ I try to keep on top of current affairs/events.

___ I listen to lectures, plays, musical performances.

___ I do stimulating mental activities/games (puzzles, word searches, etc.).

___ I read every day (the newspaper, internet, magazines, or books).

___ I do something at least once a week to improve my skills.

___ I try to see more than one side of an issue, especially for things that are controversial.

___ I engage in intellectual discussions.

___ I look up things that I don't know and/or ask questions to learn from others.

___ I do things to stimulate my thinking and increase my learning.

___ I seek new information that can help me in my recovery.

___ I research things I hear in conversation or through public media.

Total Score (out of a possible 44): _____



SCORING KEY

- ✓ If you scored from 30 to 44 points, that's excellent! You are clearly doing a lot for your intellectual wellness!
- ✓ If you scored from 15 to 29 points, you're doing great though you can look over the items again and see where there are 2-3 areas you want to improve.
- ✓ If you scored from 0 to 14 points, review your responses, to see if there is one area you may want to improve. Read over some of the resources, ideas, and tips on brain health in this issue of *Words of Wellness*. Consider one thing you may want to do. Build on what you are already doing well.

Check out our complete *Wellness Inventory*.

Double-click on the "resources" tab at www.cspnj.org

Free Resources for Intellectual Wellness

- Podcasts are free to listen to online or to download to your phone or computer. You can find almost any topic through a "podcaster" such as stitcher.com or soundcloud.com
- TED talks: These popular videos are about 10-20 minutes each and present lectures by experts on a variety of topics. Browse the library at ted.com
- E-books: If you have a way of reading an e-book, like a computer or electronic reader, you can download free books from Project Gutenberg (at Gutenberg.org). You will not find new books here—these are older books with expired copyrights. However, many of these are engaging classics. If you don't have an electronic reader, you may be able to borrow one from your public library.
- Audiobooks: Volunteers have offered their time to record books. The quality varies, and the book are not new bestsellers, but the audiobooks are free at librivox.org

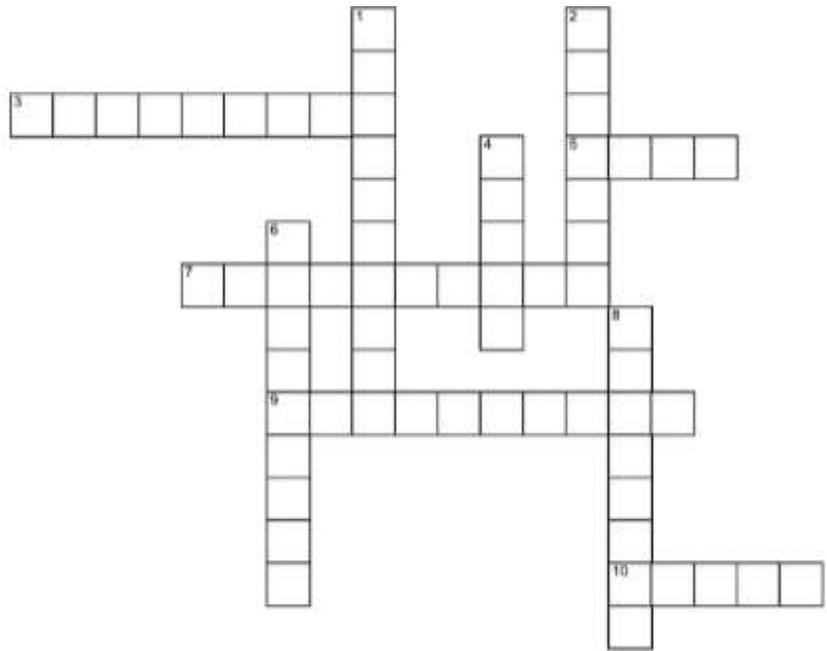
Challenge your brain with this puzzle!

ACROSS

- 3 this kind of puzzle
- 5 one way to learn new information
- 7 a different kind of thinking
- 9 he researched expressive writing
- 10 recharges your batteries

DOWN

- 1 a way to calm your mind and body
- 2 a free resource for intellectual wellness
- 4 listening to this can lower stress
- 6 one source for current events
- 8 this activity is good for your brain



National Wellness Week was launched to inspire individuals and communities to incorporate the Eight Dimensions of Wellness into their lives. Join others in co-creating a future in which individuals with behavioral health conditions pursue optimal health, happiness, recovery, and full and satisfying lives in the community.⁴



September 16-22, 2018
NATIONAL WELLNESS WEEK
Connecting All Aspects of Behavioral Health

References and Resources

Thanks to *William Latin* for developing the *Intellectual Wellness* article! The crossword puzzle is from <https://www.puzzle-maker.com/> The graphics in this issue are from [openclipart.org](https://www.openclipart.org)

¹ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/being-a-lifelong-bookworm-may-keep-you-sharp-in-old-age-6786112/> Also see these articles:

<https://newrepublic.com/article/135326/digital-reading-no-substitute-print> AND <https://www.rtor.org/2015/08/11/4-ways-to-cultivate-intellectual-wellness/>

² Pennebaker, J. W. (2004). *Writing to heal: A guided journal for recovering from trauma and emotional upheaval*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

³ Thanks to Maureen Bodnar for this article, which is adapted from one she wrote in 2012 for an earlier edition of *Words of Wellness*.

⁴ From <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA16-4952/SMA16-4952.pdf>

**We would love to hear
 how you celebrate
 Wellness Week
 in September 2018!**

