

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



724 Is it Time to Get Your Brain Some Exercise?

Around this time of year, a lot of eating takes place. And...the majority of people add extra pounds. Come January, there is going to be a storm of New Year's resolutions to increase workouts to lose that weight. That's great for the body, but how about a workout for the brain? I'm Jerry Roberts with the ins and outs of exercising our minds. That's next, on The Extra Point.

In the 1980s I ran into a guy at a conference who told me that as we get older, it's more and more important to exercise the brain, not just the body. The brain controls every function of the body, so it makes sense to keep it in top shape.

So, what exactly does that mean? How do you exercise your brain? What kind of exercises are useful? How long should the workouts be? How will I know the exercises are working? Let's try to package this up today. It's not hard, but it does require some focus.

1. Write more. Writing is a main way to communicate our thoughts. Writing is an active process and, if not distracted — put that phone on *do not disturb* — it engages us to focus thoughts to paper. Yes, I said paper. Some experts say that the physical act of writing, not keyboarding, but writing is important. It's also different.

We communicate so much through the keyboard, or thumbs on the phone, and not that much by the conventional means of grabbing a pen and writing something out. Write a letter, not a short note, but a letter to a friend. See how it engages you, draws you in. It's just you, your thoughts, the pen, and the paper. It qualifies as a brain exercise.

2. Learn something new. It could be a work skill you've never been exposed to before, or you might try a hobby. The brain exercising benefits come when you go for something

you've had no experience with. If you work with your hands at your job, fixing things, maybe you pick up a hobby that's not about putting things together, and instead might be more perceptive or visual, like painting.

If you work on the computer all day at your job, maybe the new hobby is to take a class on how to do basic auto repair. Again, the key word here is different. Force the brain to create new connections to information.

3. Here's where different really comes into play, and this confused me a bit at first. We are creatures of habit. Most of us put on our shoes the same way, every time. If you put them on with right foot first, it's likely always right foot first. You'll tie a certain shoe first, every time. You'll put underwear and pants on with one of your legs first, every time. You put a shirt or blouse on, the same arm first, all the time. You get where I'm going with this.

The exercise for the brain is to change those things. According to psychologists, it helps to put the other leg into the pants first, put on the other sock first, tie the other shoe first, and so on. It will feel weird at the beginning. At least it did for me.

It doesn't end there. There was a whole list of things to change. I don't wear a watch, but in those days I did, on my left wrist. I was told to switch it over to the right wrist. I ate meat then and I would use a fork with the right hand and cut the meat with the left. So, I had to cut with the right hand, and it felt a little unsure, not as precise.

I played golf, right-handed, and there was even a thought to trying to do it from the left. I had a friend who had left-handed clubs. I tried to hit some balls with them at the driving range, and it was comical — not to mention dangerous.

(Con't.)

Go home with a different route, hold the phone with the other hand and, in short, do everything I could think of the opposite way. The goal was to do this for 30 days, and the theory was that I would be forcing my brain to make new neural connections. In other words, I would be exercising my brain.

I did my best, forgot a bunch of times, and it wasn't even close to perfect, but I found myself concentrating more on things I had always taken for granted. The dominant hand didn't get any less dominant, but the other hand seemed to end up stronger. Something else, I got a boost in creativity. My critical thinking skills seemed to become a little more critical, or maybe clear is the better way to express it.

Does your brain need exercise? Could you commit to doing a whole bunch of things differently, for a month?

Start today. Eat with the other hand. Pick up your phone with the other hand. Put on clothes the other way. Kiss your significant other, turning your head in the other direction as your lips meet.

Did I get you on that one? Have fun with it. Your brain will be glad you did.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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