

+BRAIN ROBBERS

By Daniel G. Amen, MD

Many everyday activities and behaviors can be the source of brain drain. Here are some common things that can hurt your brain and body.

Lack of new learning: No learning actually causes the brain to disconnect itself. The brain gets easily bored and requires new and different challenges to stay healthy. Once the brain really learns something, such as how to navigate the streets of your hometown, it uses less and less energy to accomplish the task.

Physical trauma: Severe injuries, concussions, and even mild trauma can affect every aspect of your health and well-being.

Drugs: Marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, methamphetamines, inhalants, and heroin seriously decrease brain function. Illegal drugs aren't the only culprits. Abusing prescription medications, such as Vicodin, Oxycontin, and Xanax, can also hurt the brain. Drug abuse may make you feel better in the short term, but in the long term, they are a disaster for brain function.

Alcohol: Studies show that people who drink every day have smaller brains than nondrinkers. When it comes to the brain, size matters! Excessive drinking lowers activity in the prefrontal cortex (PFC), the area responsible for judgment, forethought, and planning. That's why people make such stupid decisions when they are drunk.

Obesity: As your weight goes up, the physical size of your brain goes down. Obesity doubles the risk for Alzheimer's disease and has been associated with decreased brain tissue.

Imbalanced hormones: Imbalances with your thyroid, estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, DHEA, or cortisol levels have all been implicated in both brain and body problems.

Poor diet: Even though your brain accounts for only about 2 percent of your body weight, it uses 20-30 percent of all the calories you consume. If you eat a fast-food diet, you will have a fast-food brain and a fast-food body.

Chronic inflammation in the body: This is now thought to be at the center of many diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and Alzheimer's disease.

[Check the Know Your Numbers section to find the important health numbers you need to know and optimize.](#)

Low blood flow: Blood flow is important because it carries oxygen, sugar, vitamins, and nutrients to the brain, and it gets rid of toxins. Anything that decreases blood flow, such as nicotine, too much caffeine, or a lack of exercise, prematurely ages it. Nowhere is this more true than for your brain.

Chronic stress: When you constantly feel stressed, your brain tells your body to secrete higher amounts of the stress hormone cortisol. At elevated levels, cortisol increases your appetite and cravings for sugar making you fat, increases muscle tension and chronic pain, increases blood pressure, and raises your risk for many serious health conditions.

Sleep deprivation: Getting less than six hours of sleep a night lowers overall brain function and causes your brain to release hormones that increase your appetite and cravings for high-sugar snacks like candy, cakes, and cookies. People who don't get enough sleep tend to eat more calories and gain weight.

Lack of exercise: When you don't exercise, you decrease blood flow to your brain, your body, and your genitals. It is well-documented that a lack of physical activity can negatively affect your weight and overall health.

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Negative thinking: We have conducted studies that show that focusing on the things you don't like lowers brain activity, causes your heart to beat faster, increases blood pressure, and negatively affects many systems in your body. Negative thinking can also sabotage your efforts to change your bad habits, lose weight, start an exercise program, or quit smoking.

Dehydration: Your body consists of 70 percent water, and your brain is 80 percent water. If you aren't drinking enough water, you reduce brain function.

Smoking: Smoking constricts blood flow to the brain.

Too much caffeine: Drinking too much caffeinated coffee, tea, sodas, or energy drinks restricts blood flow to the brain, dehydrates the brain, body, and skin and fools the brain into thinking it does not need to sleep.

Too much TV: Watching too much TV can be harmful for your brain and body. Excessive TV watching has been associated with ADD in children and Alzheimer's disease in adults. Watching more than two hours of TV a day also significantly increases your risk for obesity.

Violent video games: Playing violent video games has led to an increased rate of violence and learning problems. With brain imaging, we see that video games work in the same area as cocaine, and kids and adults tend to get hooked on them like a drug. Spending more than two hours a day playing video games increases the risk of being overweight.

Excessive texting and social networking on the Internet: Neuroscientists have shown that spending too much time texting and social networking leads to attention problems and may cause difficulties communicating face-to-face. It also takes time away from physical activities, making you more prone to weight gain and a decrease in your general health.

If after following the solutions on this website, you feel like you need additional help, call the Amen Clinics for an appointment at 1-888-564-2700.