

BRAIN AND BODY: HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER

When you take care of your temple, it takes much better care of you.



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Imagine this scene: The date was going perfectly. He knew this was the night to declare his feelings.

"I love you!" he blurted out to the woman of his dreams. "I love you . . . from the bottom of my *temporal lobe!*"

Unless the woman was a med student, this statement would probably fall short of the intended effect. The thing is, though, he's spot on for accuracy, because the brain is the organ that processes emotions.

The ways in which you process emotions, think clearly, solve problems, direct your muscles, interact with others—all that and much more is tied to the complex and incredible organ in your skull.

A SHARED TEMPLE

President Russell M. Nelson has taught: "Your physical body is a magnificent creation of God. It is His temple as well as yours and must be treated with reverence."¹

There's something powerful about viewing your body as God's temple as well as yours. It makes you want to treat it with more reverence.

Your spirit, which resides within your body and gives it life (see James 2:26), makes choices that affect the health of your body, including your brain. Your health can, in turn, affect your spirit. So it's in your best interest to maintain good spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health because they influence each other.

For the Strength of Youth says, "Do all you can to safeguard your physical and emotional health so that you can fulfill your divine potential as a son or daughter of God" ([2011], 27).

Physical and emotional health are closely connected. Choices you make each day can contribute to keeping your brain either stuck in the mud or running at its best. The cool part is, when you *do* take care of your brain, you're automatically taking great care of the rest of your body at the same time.

Here are a few strategies for safeguarding your temple, including the brain that helps regulate it. These suggestions can help the average person maintain general health. There are, however, certain mental and emotional challenges that would not necessarily be improved by these strategies. Those kinds of challenges would require professional diagnosis and treatment.



SECRETS OF SLUMBER

Did you know that the scriptures give counsel on sleep as well as when to go to bed? Doctrine and Covenants 88:124 says to "retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated."

Most teens don't get enough sleep. Medical experts recommend around nine hours of sleep for teens each night.



(Yes, *nine*.) Getting enough sleep is super important for keeping your brain and body in top form.

You risk more than a bad case of brain fog if you lose sleep consistently. Here are a few of the possible side effects:

- Poorer emotional regulation, learning, and memory.
- A reduced immune system.
- Less ability to focus.

The good news is, the opposite is also true. You can boost your immune system, sharpen your mind, focus more clearly, and enhance your ability to regulate emotions—all from getting enough sleep. No matter how funny the cat videos are, it's not worth being a zombie the next day. Go to bed! The cats will still be there tomorrow.



PREMIUM FUEL

The Word of Wisdom teaches you much more than what *not* to put in your body. In fact, the “do’s” outweigh the “don’ts.” For instance, the Word of Wisdom says you can use *all* healthy herbs (i.e., plants).

Loathe broccoli? Despise apples? No worries. Keep on spinning the Wheel of Fruits and Veggies until you find some you like.

Good nutrition plays a major role in your overall health, including the efficiency of your brain. It sometimes helps to think of your brain like the engine of an expensive car. While a high-performance car can run on low-quality fuel, it always runs best on premium fuel.

Eating healthy foods provides that premium fuel to your brain. Giving your brain the right fuel will help you feel better and think more clearly. Read section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants for guidance on what to eat.

The rest of your body benefits from that good fuel, too. You’ll likely have more energy, get sick less often, and reap many other awesome benefits of good nutrition.



TEMPLE MAINTENANCE

For years, scientists have noticed a link between exercise and mental health. Evidence continues to suggest that exercise—especially aerobic exercise—helps strengthen your brain and allows you to maintain a better handle on your emotions.²

But really, exercise is healthy for your *whole* body. Elder Jörg Klebingat of the Seventy taught: “Regularly give your body the exercise it needs and deserves. If you are physically able, decide today to be the master of your own house and begin a regular, long-term exercise program, suited to your abilities, combined with a healthier diet.”³

You don’t need to spend hours each day at the gym. Small amounts of exercise can fit into open slots throughout your week. Park at the back of the parking lot. Take a quick walk around the block after dinner. Use a bike instead of a car if you can get where you’re going in a reasonable amount of time.

Common guidelines for aerobic exercise are to aim for somewhere around 150 minutes of moderate exercise, or 75 minutes of

vigorous exercise, each week.⁴

If you want another guideline to shoot for, you might want to work up to walking 6 miles (8 km) a day, several days a week. This is similar to what’s expected of many missionaries. Start slow and build up.





STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress has a bad reputation, but it's actually not all bad. We need at least a little of it in our lives to stay productive and to keep improving. This type of good stress is sometimes called "eustress." It's what you might feel when learning a new skill or accomplishing something difficult yet rewarding.

Too much stress, though, can wear you out. One prime culprit here is often self-inflicted: overscheduling. Choosing to take music lessons might be a fine goal. But trying to do music lessons, dance lessons, soccer practice, honor classes, debate club, and karate all at the same time? That's a recipe for burnout.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, then of the First Presidency, said, "We would do well to slow down a little, proceed at the optimum speed for our circumstances, focus on the significant, lift up our eyes, and truly see the things that matter most."⁵

BRAIN HEALTH

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, health and wellness remain elusive. This can certainly be the case with mental health.

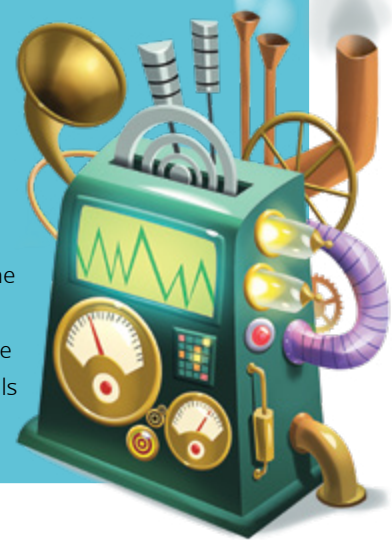
There's a world of difference between the sadness you feel after a disappointing day versus feeling so down that you struggle to even get out of bed every day for weeks.

For the Strength of Youth says: "Disappointment and occasional sadness are part of this mortal life. However, if you have prolonged feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, or depression, talk with your parents and your bishop and seek help" (27).

Part of seeking help—and encouraging others to seek help—involves removing the stigma often associated with mental illness. Nobody in good conscience would ask someone in a wheelchair to stop using the wheelchair, or insist that the wheelchair is an unnecessary "crutch." Yet sometimes emotional illness is viewed this way. "Just snap out of it," some might misguidedly say, or, "You just have to choose to feel better."

Mental health issues are serious and should not be fought alone.

If you or someone you know needs help, try visiting mentalhealth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org to find ideas on where to begin. In the meantime, remember the following from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "Old sailing ships had periods when the wind did not blow. They were 'dead in the water.' But the wind will return. The sails will fill. You will come into port."⁶



BE YOUR BEST YOU

In all your efforts to improve, please remember the following: if you must make comparisons, compare only your current self with your former self. We all have strengths, gifts, and talents. Yet no two of us are strong, gifted, or talented in precisely the same ways. So please, don't get caught up in the comparison trap.

Remember to safeguard your physical and emotional health as well as your spiritual health as you seek to become the best possible version of you.

And that person is good enough any day of the year. **NE**

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NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Your Body: A Magnificent Gift to Cherish," *New Era*, Aug. 2019, 4.
2. See hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy-sleep/sleep-better/teenagers-and-sleep-how-much-sleep-is-enough.
3. Jörg Klebingat, Oct. 2014 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 35).
4. See heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/aha-recs-for-physical-activity-in-adults.
5. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Of Things That Matter Most," Oct. 2010 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 21).
6. Jeffrey R. Holland's Facebook page, post from Mar. 17, 2016, [facebook.com/lds.jeffrey.r.holland](https://www.facebook.com/lds.jeffrey.r.holland); quoted at ChurchofJesusChrist.org/mentalhealth.