

# Appendix A: The Age-Proof Brain Seven-Day Challenge

If you want to get a jump start on the brain-healthy habits I outlined in part three, and you're up for a week of Brain Boot Camp, this weeklong challenge is one way to try things out and see what works best for you. Don't worry; this boot camp won't involve any bullhorns, obstacle courses, or treading water in jeans. This isn't designed to be a hell week. Rather a fun week to explore new options and simple, small, practical changes.

Here's a full week's worth of activities, meal ideas, and suggestions to get you living the age-proof brain life! The goal of this challenge is not to have you do these same steps forever; rather, I want you to view this as a fun way to try out new things, see how you feel, and decide which practices you want to incorporate into your life moving forward after the seven days are up. This means that this week, you'll apply the same times for waking up and going to bed even on your days off from work or days when you don't *need* to be anywhere in the morning. (I know, I know—sleeping in on a Saturday is one of life's simple pleasures. But you may just discover that you enjoy those quiet morning hours, too.) If you see the wake-up time and freak out, you can adjust the schedule to fit your lifestyle.

Before we begin, a few caveats: this challenge accommodates a Monday to Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM work schedule. It also assumes you commute to work and your diet includes meat and dairy. (I know this won't apply to everyone!) If you are retired or semiretired, have a flexible schedule, work from home, work different hours, are a vegetarian (or a vampire), see my suggestions on page 000 to customize the challenge.

I build in different times for a workout. Exercise timing is so personalized. Some people thrive with a morning workout, some like to get that boost in the afternoon, and some prefer the evening. This challenge allows you to experiment and see what works best for you. Of course, if you already know you just don't have the energy to exercise effectively after 5 PM, fit it in as you usually would. Also, a quick word on snacks. I include one suggested snack each afternoon. If you feel like you need another one, opt for something minimally processed, like nuts, fruit, hummus, veggies, or a healthy carb. See my tips at the end of the challenge for using the following as a template and adjusting it to suit your needs.

Ready to do this brain boot camp? Now drop and give me twenty push-ups. Just kidding, no need for that right now. Let's do this!

<challenge day>

## Monday

7:00 AM	Wake up!
7:15 AM	Get outside for a 10-minute walk.
7:30 AM	Breakfast: <i>Bananas and almond butter, by itself or on top of whole-grain bread for a brain supercharge. If you need more calories, try a hard-boiled egg and Greek yogurt with berries.</i>
8:00 AM	Time to head to work. Use your commute as learning time; listen to an informative podcast or audiobook.
9:00 AM	Workday start
12:00 PM	Lunch: <i>Wraps—take a whole grain tortilla and load it with leafy greens, steamed veggies, beans and/or lean protein like tuna, salmon, tofu, or chicken.</i>
12:45 PM	10-minute after-lunch walk
3:30 PM	Brain-healthy snack: <i>Hummus and veggies</i>
5:00 PM	Reconnecting commute. Call a friend or relative you like to talk to.
6:00 PM	30-minute evening workout
6:45 PM	Dinner: <i>Frittata filled with combinations of broccoli, asparagus, mushrooms, spinach, roasted red pepper, and cherry tomatoes. Try feta or Caprese mixed in as well. A side dish can be a simple salad or whole wheat roll.</i>
7:45 PM	10-minute after-dinner walk
9:30 PM	Device shut-off time. Try a little mindfulness before bed.

10:30 PM	Time for bed
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Today's Tip: To get in the habit of going on that morning walk, put your walking shoes somewhere you will see them to remind you. Whether it's solo time or social is up to you; both have brain health benefits. Ask yourself what you need that day and take that time to get it.

<challenge day>

## Tuesday

7:00 AM	Wake up!
7:15 AM	Get outside for a 10-minute walk.
7:30 AM	Breakfast: <i>Oatmeal. Instant is fine; just avoid oatmeal with added sugar. Load it with berries (frozen or fresh work), and for a boost of protein, mix in almond butter. This is one of my favorites!</i>
8:00 AM	Time to head to work. Use your commute as learning time; listen to an informative podcast or audiobook.
9:00 AM	Workday start
11:30 AM	30-minute pre-lunch workout
12:00 PM	Lunch: <i>Amp up your favorite hearty sandwich. Opt for whole-grain bread and stay away from processed deli meat with nitrates. Add spinach, tomatoes, and/or avocado.</i>
12:45 PM	10-minute after-lunch walk
3:30 PM	Brain-healthy snack: <i>Beet chips</i>
5:00 PM	Comedy commute. Listen to some standup or a funny audiobook or podcast.
6:45 PM	Dinner: <i>Salmon with roasted root vegetables and a bit of olive oil and brown rice or quinoa. Make enough salmon, and maybe extra rice, so you'll have leftovers to enjoy tomorrow.</i>
7:45 PM	10-minute after-dinner walk
9:30 PM	Device shut-off time
10:30 PM	Time for bed

Today's Tip: If you have trouble focusing at work, try the Pomodoro method (described in chapter sixteen).

<challenge day>

## Wednesday

7:00 AM	Wake up!
7:15 AM	Get outside for a 10-minute walk.
7:30 AM	Breakfast: <i>Green smoothie. Blend up a combo that appeals to you of leafy greens, berries, banana, steamed beets, Greek yogurt, nut butter, and/or chia seeds, which are all brain-healthy options. Or, if you need something more substantial, try an egg on top of last night's leftover quinoa or brown rice.</i>
8:00 AM	Time to head to work. Use your commute as learning time; listen to an informative podcast or audiobook.
9:00 AM	Workday start
12:00 PM	Lunch: <i>Leftover salmon salad made from last night's cooked salmon on top of greens and veggies of your choice with vinaigrette. Add whole wheat bread if needed.</i>
12:45 PM	10-minute after-lunch walk
3:30 PM	Brain-healthy snack: <i>Walnuts and almonds</i>
5:00 PM	Arts and architecture commute. Or, science and history commute. Find an informative podcast on a subject you're interested in outside your career to listen to on your way home.
6:45 PM	Dinner: <i>Fajitas. Seasoned sauteed chicken or tofu, black beans, bell pepper strips, and onions with whole-grain tortillas. Save some of the protein and veggies for tomorrow's breakfast.</i>
7:45 PM	10-minute after-dinner walk
9:30 PM	Device shut-off time
10:30 PM	Time for bed

Today's Tip: Make eating healthy an easy choice by making treats something you have to leave your home to get. Keep fresh fruits and veggies front and center in your refrigerator and kitchen for easy snacking.

<challenge day>

## Thursday

6:30 AM	Wake up! (A bit earlier today if you're fitting in an early morning workout!)
6:45 AM	Get outside for a 10-minute walk. Use it as a warm-up, then go right into a 30-minute workout.
7:30 AM	Breakfast: <i>Leftovers scrambles. Use last night's healthy dinner components to add some extra flavor and texture to scrambled eggs. Try salsa on the</i>

	<i>side for a flavor boost. Add a healthy carb such as oatmeal or whole wheat toast if needed.</i>
8:00 AM	Time to head to work. Use your commute as learning time; listen to an informative podcast or audiobook.
9:00 AM	Workday start
12:00 PM	Lunch: <i>Chicken and avocado salad with blueberry balsamic dressing. Add a brain healthy carb such as brown rice or whole wheat pasta if needed.</i>
12:45 PM	10-minute after-lunch walk
3:30 PM	Brain-healthy snack: <i>Cottage cheese with fruit or veggies</i>
5:00 PM	Foreign language commute. If you speak or are learning a second language, try listening to the news or a podcast in that language. Or, try a beginner how-to in a new language that interests you. If the news or a podcast is too difficult, a great trick is to listen to preschool-age cartoon shows in a foreign language.
6:45 PM	Dinner: <i>Fish (like snapper) with miso and a side of steamed broccolini. If needed add a healthy carb like brown rice, a whole wheat roll, or quinoa.</i>
7:45 PM	10-minute after-dinner walk
9:30 PM	Device shut-off time
10:30 PM	Time for bed

Today's Tip: Remember that it's often easier to fall asleep in a cool room. If you've been tossing and turning at night, revisit chapter ten and check your thermostat.

<challenge day>

## Friday

7:00 AM	Wake up!
7:15 AM	Get outside for a 10-minute walk.
7:30 AM	Breakfast: <i>Breakfast parfait. Layer unsweetened Greek yogurt with berries and nuts. Add poached eggs on whole grain toast with avocado if you need more fuel.</i>
8:00 AM	Time to head to work. Use your commute as learning time; listen to an informative podcast or audiobook.
9:00 AM	Workday start
11:30 AM	30-minute workout
12:00 PM	Lunch: <i>Sushi (salmon-avocado or cucumber rolls made with brown rice), edamame, and miso soup</i>
12:45 PM	10-minute after-lunch walk
3:30 PM	Brain-healthy snack: <i>Popcorn</i>
5:00 PM	TedTalk commute—listen to a TedTalk on the subject of happiness.
6:45 PM	Dinner: <i>Grilled chicken with sweet potatoes and steamed green beans. Add fruit for dessert.</i>

7:45 PM	10-minute after-dinner walk
9:30 PM	Device shut-off time
10:30 PM	Time for bed

Today's Tip: Though it's the kickoff to the weekend, resist the temptation to stay up later tonight. If you are absolutely exhausted from the week, you can shift a little bit and set your alarm a little later tomorrow. But ideally, keep your weekend bedtimes and wake-up calls the same as your work-week schedule; otherwise, it will throw off your internal clock for next Monday's wake up and bedtime.

<challenge day>

## Saturday

7:00 AM	Wake up!
7:15 AM	Get outside for a 10-minute walk.
7:30 AM	Breakfast: <i>Scrambled egg tacos. Load them with cooked or raw spinach, black beans, diced tomatoes, and guacamole.</i>
12:00 PM	Lunch: <i>Salmon with roasted vegetables. If needed add a healthy carb such as brown rice, quinoa, or a whole wheat roll.</i>
12:45 PM	10-minute after-lunch walk.
1-3:00 PM	Try your 30-minute workout. Or, since it's Saturday, make it a longer one; play a sport with some friends, try a new type of yoga or group fitness, or go for a challenging hike, bike ride, or canoe excursion.
3:30 PM	Brain-healthy snack: <i>Chia pudding.</i>
4:00 PM	Try learning a new skill. That might be doing an online tutorial for some sort of art/craft, learning a new song on your instrument, or even learning the latest TikTok dance. Just have fun with it—it's Saturday, after all.
6:45 PM	Dinner: <i>Lean pork chops with broccolini and zucchini noodles or whole-grain pasta.</i>
7:45 PM	10-minute after-dinner walk
9:30 PM	Device shut-off time
10:30 PM	Time for bed

Today's Tip: Take a social media sabbatical. At least take a couple of hours on the weekend and put your phone away; stay away from screens.

<challenge day>

## Sunday

7:00 AM	Wake up!
7:15 AM	Get outside for a 10-minute walk.
7:30 AM	Breakfast: <i>Veggie omelets. These are a great way to use up any leftovers you might have from last night's dinner. You can also try adding some salmon (fresh, canned, or leftover from lunch yesterday) for an added brain benefit.</i>
9:30-11:30 AM	Use this window for today's 30-minute workout.
11:30 AM	Put together tonight's dinner in the slow cooker.
12:00 PM	Lunch: <i>Stir-fry with lean meats and vegetables like peppers, carrots, cauliflower, mushrooms, and/or broccoli. Add brown rice or quinoa if needed.</i>
12:45 PM	10-minute after-lunch walk
3:30 PM	Brain-healthy snack: <i>Unsweetened Greek yogurt.</i>
6:45 PM	Dinner: <i>Slow cooker stew or roast. Stick to a recipe with lean meats and lots of veggies, and stay away from things that call for a lot of salt, heavy cream, or additives. If needed add a healthy carb like a sweet potato.</i>
7:45 PM	10-minute after-dinner walk
9:30 PM	Device shut-off time
10:30 PM	Time for bed

Today's Tip: Today's challenge day has lots of open time. If you can, resist the urge to fill all of that time with a lot of errands, chores, and busy work. We live in a world where we feel like we always need to do something. Challenge yourself to do nothing—it is good for the brain. Close your eyes. Nap. Put your feet up. Go to a garden and look at the flowers. Watch the sun set. (I know these aren't really "nothing," but they are things we often don't give ourselves time to do.)

## <A>Customizing the Age-Proof Brain Seven-Day Challenge

*Wake and sleep:* Feel free to set different wake and sleep times if you need to leave for work earlier/later or if you know you don't need eight hours of sleep each night. If you're not sure how many hours of sleep you need, use the guide outlined in chapter ten to gauge it. Note

that is a separate three- to four-day trial, with a two-hour “no devices” window before bed, and no alarms—so I don’t recommend doing it during a time it might make you late for work.

*Work schedule:* If you don’t work Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM, switch the work days to match your schedule. (I hope you get at least one day off to give your brain a break!) If you are retired, pick some times that work for you.

*Creating a commute:* If you work from home, or are lucky enough to live just a short distance from your workplace, create that same targeted brain time. Take twenty to thirty minutes in the morning and evening to do a “mental commute” that transitions you from work mode to relaxation. Or, take another walk, alone or with a buddy.

*Adjusting for special diets:* If you are vegan or vegetarian, swap in brain-healthy plant-based meals based on the guidelines in chapter fourteen. Follow the same basic principles: minimize additives and prioritize healthy fats and proteins, and make sure you are eating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables. Obviously, avoid any foods that trigger any food sensitivities or allergies, and follow what works for you.

*Squeezing in shorter workouts:* I know how challenging it can be to fit 120 minutes of exercise into our busy lives. It’s great to go to the gym, take an exercise class, or play a sport a couple of times a week, but if that doesn’t fit into your day, here are some simple solutions that don’t involve carving out a 30-minute window:

- Make one of your post-meal walks a longer run.
- Set aside three time windows during your work day for some express exercises.



- Try doing just 5 minutes of exercise every hour. In six or seven hours of sitting, you'll end up incorporating 30 minutes of exercise. Set a timer to go off every 55 minutes and do:
  - 1 minute of jumping jacks
  - 1 minute of lunges
  - 1 minute of squats
  - 1 minute of planks (yes, that's a long plank to start with—try working your way up!)
  - 1 minute of push-ups on the ground or against a wall

Hope you enjoy the challenge and find simple action steps to include in your day to age-proof your brain.