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SURPRISING HABITS HURTING YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Everything we think, feel, and do involves our brains, so keeping them healthy is worth our time. But doing so might require more from us than a nutritional diet, exercise, and occasional sudoku. Everyday habits can profoundly affect our neurological health, and some will likely surprise you.

Checking Our Phones After Waking Up

Many people have their phones in hand before they even get out of bed, but this morning routine could be doing significant damage. Immediately inputting so much sensory information causes our brains to miss crucial stages in the natural waking process. The dopamine we get from checking messages and likes also primes our brains for more, creating further distractions throughout the day. Experts suggest waiting an hour to check your phone, but if you can't last that long, every minute you delay counts.

Engaging in Negative Thinking

Did you know poor mental health impairs our ability to think clearly? The same is true with patterns of negative thinking. Neuroplasticity means the input we give our brains shapes and changes how they function, and negative thinkers

have more difficulty reasoning and forming memories. Fortunately, neuroplasticity also means we can choose to change. Mindfulness, stress relief, purposeful positive thinking, and therapy can all help us learn to turn negative thoughts around. It will improve brain health, and we'll likely feel happier, too.

Spending Too Much Time Alone

Humans are social creatures. So, while our brains need new challenges and information to stay sharp, they also crave social interaction. Spending time with others improves our mental health and ability to form memories. Socializing also keeps our brains active, which neuroscientists believe might fight dementia. Specifically, older adults can have trouble switching between active and daydream states, but social interaction will help sharpen that skill. Alone time is crucial, but too much of a good thing can be dangerous. Make sure to interact with friends and family often or find ways to meet new people whose company you enjoy.



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I CRACKED THE CASE!

How I Solved 'The Mystery of the Constantly Breaking Teeth'

You'd never know it from the outside, but one of the best parts of being a dentist is playing detective. I love when a patient comes to me with a tooth-related mystery and challenges me to solve it! A while back, I got to tackle a mystery I call "The Case of the Constantly Breaking Teeth."

This case centered on a patient who I'll name "Lucy." When she found me, Lucy was in a tricky situation. When she visited other dentists, they told her that her teeth looked great. She didn't have cavities, gum disease, or other typical tooth problems. But then, her "perfect" teeth started to break!

It was a nightmare. Every time Lucy bit down, she risked cracking a tooth. She was constantly in her dentist's office for emergency fixes. It happened so often that the breaks started getting in the way of her work and even ruining her vacations. She saw dentist after dentist, but no one could explain why when they fixed one cracked tooth, another tooth broke weeks or months later.

Finally, Lucy came to me for help. "They all tell me, 'It's your bite!' but none of them can tell me what's wrong with my bite," she explained. To solve the mystery, I did something Lucy's other dentists might not have tried: I used my iTero Element to take a digital scan of her teeth.

If I've ever stuck a white wand in your mouth and showed you a colorful scan of

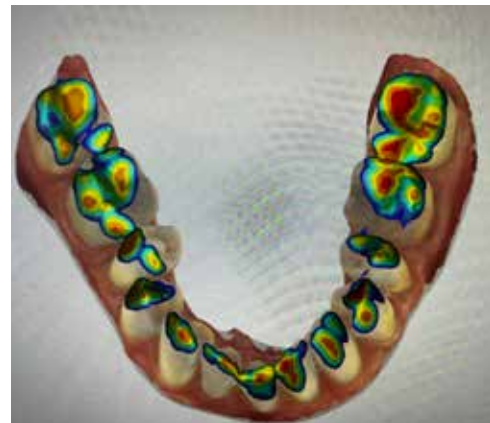
your teeth, you've experienced the iTero. I used it to scan Lucy's mouth and show her exactly what was happening with her bite. Right away, I spotted her problem!

In a normal bite, the greatest bite force (which shows up as orange and red on the iTero scan) happens on the back teeth, which can handle the pressure. But in Lucy's scan, every single tooth had spots of orange or red! Using the iTero's digital photographs, I showed Lucy the color difference and pointed out other problems. Her front teeth were taller than her back teeth, and the teeth on the right side of her mouth were higher than those on her left.

"All of this bite force is destroying your teeth," I explained. "When your previous dentists 'fixed' one tooth, that adjustment changed your bite, protecting the first broken tooth but putting a new tooth at risk. Then, that tooth broke, and the cycle continued. If we align your bite with orthodontics, we should be able to reposition your teeth and stop them from breaking!"

Lucy was so relieved that she started crying right there in my dental chair. Now, she's done with Invisalign and wears her retainers at night. I don't want to jinx it, but she's been breakage-free for quite a while now — just as I predicted!

Lucy's story is a great example of why I love my iTero Element. It's helped me



solve more dental mysteries than I can count. I love how easily my patients can see their bite force on its color-coded scans, that I can view their bite from any angle, and that I can easily compare old and new scans to see how their teeth have changed.

The iTero also saves patients a lot of time. If my lab needs to 3D print an appliance for your child, for example, we can take an iTero scan during their regular checkup and use it to print the appliance without calling your kiddo back into the office. That means you can skip the usual mold and spacer appointments, doing the work of three visits in one.

To see the iTero in action and discover the other dental mysteries I've solved, follow Great Smiles on Facebook (Facebook.com/greatsmilesnj) and Instagram (@great-smiles_nj). I'll see you in our next post!

To your great smiles and better health,

Tried-and-True Methods to Break Your Kids' Screen Addiction

Every parent knows they should limit their children's screen time, but accomplishing it is far easier said than done. Kids love their devices as much as adults and would happily spend hours glued to their electronics if we let them. Fortunately, we've discovered some tried-and-true methods for parents to prevent bad habits.

Establish time limits.

Every parent must determine the right amount of screen time for their kids, but it helps to know what experts recommend. The American Academy of Pediatrics says screen time should be strictly limited to video calls for children under 18 months, children 18 to 24 months should only watch high-quality programming with an adult, and kids aged 2 to 5 should watch no more than one hour daily. After that, the science gets a bit fuzzier, but most experts agree that less is best.

Lay down the law.

Once you decide on time limits, implement them ruthlessly. You can set most tablets to automatically turn off after they've been viewed for a set amount of time each day. Once time is up, it's up — and using someone else's tablet is unallowed. Furthermore, ask questions about what your kids are viewing and playing and use strict parental controls to ensure they only access age-appropriate content.

Create screen-free zones.

Specific times and places should always be off-limits for screens. A prevalent rule involves no screens and food together; eating should be mindful, and dinner should be family time. Experts also recommend no devices for one hour before bed. You might also consider requiring your kids to look away from screens and make eye contact while talking to someone. Other decrees could



include tablets not leaving the car once you arrive at a destination or no devices while guests visit.

Be a good role model.

Yes, you're the parent, and no one can tell you how much time to spend on your phone. But children quickly adopt what they see. When the adults around them are always glued to different electronic devices, it makes the habit seem even more attractive. Reducing screen time will benefit your health and ability to connect with your family. Limiting your use in front of your kids specifically will show them you practice what you preach.

THIS 6-YEAR-OLD MARVEL FAN BECAME A REAL-LIFE SUPERHERO

Every kid dreams of being a superhero, but Bridger Walker was the rare 6-year-old who acted when he was needed. In 2020, the young Marvel fan learned that being a hero requires sacrifice but also comes with great rewards.

Bridger's story started when he and his 4-year-old sister visited a friend's house. The friend told the two that one of the dogs in the backyard was "mean." So when a dog came barreling at his sister, Bridger bravely stood in front of her and "kept moving" to block the dog's path.

The dog latched onto Bridger's cheek, creating a disfiguring injury requiring a two-hour surgery and 90 stitches. But none of that mattered to the 6-year-old as long as his sister was safe. When Bridger's father asked him why he stepped in front of the dog, he said Bridger responded, "If someone had to die, I thought it should be me."

Bridger's incredible actions went viral. Once celebrities learned that Bridger loves Marvel movies, they jumped into action. Chris Evans, who plays Captain America, recorded a special message of praise for Bridger and sent him an authentic Captain America

shield. "Iron Man" actor Robert Downey Jr. also sent a video message, promising Bridger a special surprise on his next birthday.

The "Spider-Man: No Way Home" cast stepped up the most. Tom Holland, who plays Spidey himself, made a live call to speak with Bridger. Then, he and co-star Zendaya invited him to visit them on set. The two made good on their promise in late 2021, and Bridger had the time of his life. The crew even helped him perform a mock stunt with Holland in full costume. Bridger got to swing through the air with Spider-Man!

Bridger has mostly stayed out of the limelight since, but he was doing well when People magazine caught up with him in 2021. He has undergone several reconstructive surgeries to reduce the attack's visible legacy. Still, his father reports Bridger doesn't want the scar to disappear entirely.

"Bridger views his scar as something to be proud of, but he also doesn't see it as being representative of his brave act," his father explained to People. "He just perceives it as, 'I was a brother, and that's what brothers do.'"



Spice Up Your Dental Routine With Medicinal Herbs

Humans didn't always have access to fluoride and mouthwash, so how did they keep their teeth clean and healthy? They relied partially on natural remedies, including medicinal herbs and spices. While today's treatments generally work better than old-fashioned methods, several plants can provide supplemental benefits to modern patients.

Clove

This at-home remedy from your grandparents' kitchen has science behind it. If you feel tooth pain and can't see your dentist right away, try chewing on a clove or swishing with clove oil to relieve your pain naturally. Clove is an antiseptic and contains a compound that numbs pain. It's also antimicrobial, killing bacteria in your mouth while giving you a break from your toothache.

Neem

People have chewed on neem twigs for many years to protect their oral health. The herb's antibacterial qualities help prevent tooth decay, and its anti-inflammatory properties can improve gum health. Plus, chewing on neem leaves can freshen your breath!

Turmeric

Another anti-inflammatory is a staple in many kitchens. Turmeric has long been used in herbal medicine and can be a lifesaver for people suffering from painful gingivitis. In addition to pain relief, turmeric helps prevent oral infection by killing bacteria.

Holy Basil

Holy basil, or tulsi, differs from the basil most Americans buy at the supermarket. It is more closely related to mint and has a more intense peppery flavor than the type popular in Italian cooking. When chewed, holy basil kills bacteria that can lead to plaque. It is also known as a remedy for bad breath.

Garlic

This favorite food will definitely not give you fresh breath, but chewing on garlic can effectively relieve tooth pain if you don't have any cloves in the house. The critical ingredient is allicin, which is also antibacterial. Even better, garlic is yet another anti-inflammatory!

None of these herbs will replace regularly brushing, flossing, and visiting your dentist. But if you want to give an extra boost to your oral health, these natural remedies could do the trick.

One-Bowl Pumpkin Muffins

Inspired by NoraCooks.com

Ingredients

- 15 oz can pumpkin purée
- 1/3 cup melted butter (or vegetable oil)
- 1/2 cup unsweetened plant-based milk
- 1 1/4 cups brown sugar
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 F. Prepare muffin pan by greasing and placing paper liners.
2. In a large mixing bowl, add pumpkin, melted butter (or oil), milk, and brown sugar, then whisk until well combined and smooth. With a sifter, sift the flour, baking powder, salt, and spices over the wet mixture.
3. Using a large wooden spoon, mix until just combined (do not over-mix).
4. Fill the muffin cups and bake for 22–25 minutes. Let cool for 30 minutes and enjoy!

Take a Break

