

Mind

The brain is the most complex organ in the human body, producing our thoughts, memories, feelings and experiences of the world. As we grow older, each of these processes can be affected, but how that happens isn't completely understood.

For example, many perimenopausal women say they have difficulty concentrating, yet scientists aren't completely sure whether or not the growing forgetfulness is a sign of aging, an effect of reduced estrogen, the result of stress, or a bit of each.

Some of the ways we age are determined by genetics, but researchers now know that lifestyle choices--what you eat, how you exercise, whether you're able to relax--can help minimize these effects on the brain.

Keeping your mind active, whether by waltzing or working on crossword puzzles, can help you stay sharp. It also helps to get a good night's sleep (often easier said than done if you're experiencing menopause-related night sweats, for example), as fatigue is known to make concentration more difficult. Mind-body techniques such as yoga and t'ai chi can help you feel less frazzled.

And while a poor diet can have deleterious effects on memory, a healthful one can bring benefits to the brain. Finally, exercise, particularly the kind that gets your heart rate up, may also be beneficial for keeping your brain at its best.