

# HERE'S TO A YEAR FILLED WITH BRAIN PLAY!

## 3 REASONS TO LET OUR BRAINS PLAY

### TOTAL BRAIN HEALTH INSIGHTS

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The playwright George Bernard Shaw once said, “we don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.” While Shaw might not have known it at the time, current research shows that when it comes to brain training, he was right.

What better time to bring more play to our programs than now? Here are 3 reasons why adding play to your brain training is one of the best ways you can bring state of the science cognitive wellness to your every days.

#### Reason #1: Play targets the thinking skills impacted by aging

Aging is known to diminish specific abilities key to our daily functioning, such as sustained attention, speedy thinking, cognitive flexibility, and short-term memory. Changes in these essential skills can make it harder to stay physically active, pursue our passions or even stay social. However, experts have found that these skills can be maintained and even improved with training, no matter our age. Play, especially against the clock, is a ready way we can engage in the targeted workouts proven to support and even sharpen our thinking. And effective, play-based training doesn’t require much commitment. Even short, bursts of activity for a few minutes a day can add up to be a powerful way to fit brain boosting into everyone’s daily routine. Try taking just 5 minutes to challenge yourself to name all the car models you can, or to create with friends a group poem by each quickly having to offer a line.

#### Reason #2: Play offers the novelty our brains crave

Our brains really love novelty. Research shows that when something is new to us, we release increased levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which primes the pleasure centers in our brains. What better way to tap that novelty-driven brain boost than through play? Play gives us a continual opportunity for unexpected outcomes, even when the structure of the game or workout is the same. Each round we play, no matter how familiar the game, offers its own element of surprise. Play-based cognitive training takes advantage of the benefits of novelty



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to deepen the benefits of the workout by motivating us to fully engaged, to learn, and to be empowered to change and grow. Try cognitive workouts that have an unexpected twist, such as [improv exercises like “Yes and...”](#) or creative art exercises such as [the famous surrealist art game “exquisite corpse,”](#) where together with friends you are asked to draw on part of a sheet folded in fourths, not seeing or knowing what others are drawing on the other folded sections.

### **Reason #3: Play makes brain training fun and sustainable**

Resolutions to improve our well-being are ever popular. Unfortunately, our promises to “do better” rarely are kept. Why do so many of us fail to meet our health goals? Experts tell us that a major roadblock to making our resolutions stick is that it’s just plain hard to keep up the momentum long enough to really change our habits. One way we can make our brain health (or any) resolutions more sustainable is by making that training more playful. Play is fun! It can keep training from getting too tedious and make the work a bit lighter and less burdensome. In addition, the novelty of play increases the chances we will stay engaged and excited to learn and change. Finally, play gives us an easy way to join with others in the pursuit of our resolutions. That additional level of social engagement not only boosts our chances of achieving our health goals but can benefit our thinking and other aspects of well-being. You can boost the fun and sustainability of your brain training goals with the proven benefits of gamification, which uses game-based play elements such as points, badges, or prizes to drive ongoing work towards a health goal. Try hosting a 1 week brain training point-based challenge or team competition that encourages folks to socialize and support each other as they work towards better brain health.

No matter how you integrate play to your cognitive fitness program, it is certain to bring an added boost.

Here’s to many years filled with play-full moments of building better brain health!

*President and founder of Total Brain Health, Cynthia R. Green, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist, author and nationally recognized expert on memory fitness and brain health.*

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### **About Total Brain Health**

At Total Brain Health, we believe all minds can thrive. We deliver science-backed, experiential training programs you can use to build better brain health. With products that support fitness across the cognitive continuum, we are proud to be a top provider of cognitive fitness programs in the U.S.