

Leader TOOLS

Keeping participants focused
on positive lifestyle choices

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GAMES, NEUROBICS & SOCIALIZATION

The Psychology Today website featured an informative article, *Eight Habits That Improve Cognitive Function* by Christopher Bergland (March 12, 2014). This article states, "In order to give your brain a full workout, you need to engage both hemispheres of the cerebrum, and both hemispheres of the cerebellum." And the article explains that the best way to do this is by trying new things in real life. This fits right in with the purpose and design of the AFEP and AFAP classes, including the group of optional class activities referred to as Games, Neurobics & Socialization.

Bergland did a meta-analysis (a statistical analysis combining the results from multiple studies) of recent research relating to neuroscience. From this, he compiled a list of habits that may improve cognitive function, regardless of one's age, and possibly help prevent against cognitive decline through the years.

- Being physically active
- Being open to new experiences
- Being curious and creative
- Developing social contacts and networks
- Engaging in mindful meditation
- Practicing games that train the brain
- Getting enough sleep
- Reducing the negative stress in your life

Read the
full article
here!

How can you build more of these components into your classes? Read on for some tips and tools that other program leaders are finding to be helpful!

COGNITIVE FUNCTION

Submitted by Kim Huff, AEA AF Program Leader Trainer & AEA Aquatic Training Specialist

Content adapted from her educational workshop, Brain Training

Research studies show that cognitive training, physical activity, socialization and a healthy diet improve cognitive function. We can easily put three of those things together (cognitive training, physical activity and socialization) in any exercise class. For example; ask the class to walk around the room or pool, ask them to stop and introduce themselves to another member of the class; then, using their right foot, write that person's name (ANKLE CIRCLE variation). Continue walking, ask them to stop and introduce themselves to another person; using their left foot, write that person's name. Continue walking, ask them to stop, introduce themselves to another person. While standing next to their new partner, see how many repetitions of the MARCH they

can do in 60 seconds – every time they lift the right leg, they must name a sporting event; every time they lift the left leg, they must name a country...the challenge is not repeating the sporting event or country.

These activities provide a physical challenge, a cognitive challenge, and give the participants a chance to socialize and possibly meet someone new.



MEMORY BOOST

Submitted by Pam DeCourcy, AEA AF Program Leader Trainer & AEA Certified

This is a fun way to help people find ways to remember something. So many times, we hear something that we want to remember, but 5 seconds later we've already forgotten it. This takes a little bit of work on the part of the program leader, but you can use this for numerous classes. One of my classes has been doing this for three weeks and wants me to continue as they remember a little more each week.

In Kim Huff's Brain Training session at IAFC, Kim pointed out that *"it is important to provide programs that include opportunities to improve cognitive health"*. Since we are already doing that in our AFAP and AFEP classes, I decided to incorporate some of her ideas into my own classes. I spend about 5 to 10 minutes in every class doing some sort of brain training exercise.



Kim challenged us to find different ways to remember something, one of which was to call an exercise a number. I decided to try this, and assigned a number to exercises from the AEA AF Program Leader manual, to see if participants can find ways to remember which exercise matches a certain number. Here's what I did:

I select exercises that are listed in both programs so I can incorporate into my AFAP and AFEP classes (the exercises are performed seated in my AFEP class). In this example I have 9 different exercises. Additionally, the first letter in each exercise also spells out a phrase; the sample here spells PAST HOMES.

- #1 **P**RAYER ARMS
- #2 **A**NKLE CIRCLE
- #3 **S**IDE NECK BEND
- #4 **T**HUMB CIRCLE

- #5 **H**EEL TOE LIFT
- #6 **O**VERHEAD CLAP
- #7 **M**ARCH
- #8 **E**LLOW BEND
- #9 **S**HOULDER BACKWARD CIRCLE

The goal is that when I call out a number between 1 and 9, they do the corresponding exercise. We started out learning just the first 4 moves, and then progressed to all 9 in the following class. Besides relating to the words PAST HOMES, I also challenged them to find other ways to remember what exercise went with what number. It's been fun to see what they come up with. When we do the **S**ide Neck Bend we include a 3-**S**econd hold; that helped them remember what #3 was. **E**ight starts with an "**E**", and so does **E**lbow in **E**lbow Bend. It's been interesting to see who can remember the exercise first.

Before class starts, they are all talking about this and helping each other remember what number goes with what exercise. So, this activity has become not only effective brain training, but also a good opportunity for social interaction.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

By Bonnie Rosenthal, AFAP & AFEP Program Leader
& AEA Certified

When I began teaching, I “took over” for an instructor who had been the Tuesday and Thursday instructor for many years with a strong following of “regular” participants. Let’s just say, they weren’t thrilled about the situation initially. Thus, I was quite nervous when I added neurobics to the class format. However, with time, the students have not only adjusted to having a new instructor, they now request many of the activities I have introduced. For example, after the warm-up, we do 3 arm exercises and then 3 exercises for the legs, etc. When I switch to the other side, after completing 2 of the 3 exercises, I ask the participants to tell me which exercise we haven’t done yet.

I also believe it is important for me to know the students’ names, and I encourage them to know one another’s names, as this builds trust and cohesiveness within the class. We include memory exercises to help learn and remember everyone’s names.

- Letter Association. State your name and an ice cream flavor (or some other topic) that begins with the first letter of your name.
- Add On Game. You might remember these games from childhood, such as, “My name is _____ and I bought _____ at the store.” Each person must add on the grocery list (or other task), remembering the items from everyone before.
- Add On + Letter Association. The item must begin with the first letter of their name. “My name is **B**onnie and I bought **B**rown crayons.” Want to add another level of challenge? This past week I assigned a number to each person at the beginning of class, which they had to remember. When it was time for the activity it went something like this, “My name is Bonnie and I bought 20 brown crayons.” Each person thereafter must remember and repeat the previous person’s statement.

Class is more than just coming together to exercise, it is about building relationships that encourage each person in the group to continue attending class, reach new goals, and enjoy life to the fullest!

