Try Something New in 2014

No matter where you are in life, there’s always something new to learn or explore. So this year, try adding one of these four new activities to your routine. These new pursuits may help challenge your brain or contribute to a fuller, more rewarding life — and you might just discover something about yourself in the process.

Learn a new language
Learning a new language may do much more than make your travels easier. Bilingualism requires the flexibility to switch between languages, and a 2010 study published in Language and Cognition found that bilinguals were also faster at switching between other types of tasks. This study adds to other research suggesting that bilinguals have better executive control, a combination of cognitive processes that help you make decisions, control impulses, and plan thoughtfully.

**Pick up an instrument**

You don’t need to become a rock star, but spending even a small amount of time practicing music may help keep you sharp. In a study by researchers at the University of St. Andrews, amateur musicians performed better than non-musicians on simple mental tests. The amateurs tended to respond faster while staying just as accurate. Pick up a guitar, flute, or harmonica this year.
Do a good deed for someone else

The more altruistic you are, the healthier you may be. In a 2013 study, teens who volunteered with children for 10 weeks had lower cholesterol and inflammation levels than their peers who didn’t volunteer. It didn’t seem to matter whether the volunteer work was sedentary or active, but the teens who reported greater changes in altruistic behavior after the study ended also experienced the biggest health benefits. So do something for others this year — oddly enough, you might also be helping yourself.
Go on an adventure

Going on an adventure may physically change your brain. In a recent study, mice who boldly went forth and explored their environment grew more new neurons than their less adventurous companions — even though all the mice were genetically identical.

While this study only examined mice, it shows a direct link between individual behavior and neuroplasticity, and may begin to explain how we develop individual personalities. Whether you travel to a country on your bucket list or find a spot in your city that you’ve never explored, take an adventure of your own.

Source: Lumosity
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