

Chapter 9

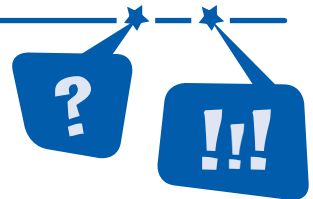
Great Brain Power

It's often been said, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." And a brain (yours, in particular) is a terrible thing to drain. Your brain has *plasticity*, which means it will continue to produce new neurons throughout your life, that is if you stimulate, or "boost," it in the right ways. Otherwise, the neurons will "drain" away. How well do you take care of your brain? Take this quiz to test your brain-care IQ.

WHIZ QUIZ:

Brain Boost or Brain Drain?

For each activity, choose whether it's a brain boost (helps your brain) or a brain drain (hurts your brain).



| | Brain Boost | Brain Drain |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Play video games. | | |
| 2. Chat with a friend about your feelings, or write about them in a journal. | | |
| 3. Spend time each day updating your online profile or sending IMs to friends. | | |
| 4. Eat sugar and caffeine to pep you up. | | |
| 5. Watch a lot of TV. | | |
| 6. Try one of your friend's prescription pills to see if it might help you, too. | | |

| | Brain Boost | Brain Drain |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 7. Dance around at home with your MP3 player. | | |
| 8. Stay up late doing your homework and get up early in the morning to work on it more. | | |
| 9. Take a break from studying for a test to play your guitar. | | |
| 10. Stay alone in your bedroom all day every weekend, reading books and listening to music. | | |



What's the Answer and Why?

1. **Brain Boost.** That's right: video games can actually be *good* for you. Because they are interactive, many video games help teach you how to strategize, recognize patterns, gather resources, make decisions, set goals, and use technology—all crucial skills you'll likely need in your future. Studies show video games can also help you increase your hand-eye coordination and develop your social smarts (especially if you have ADHD). Of course, just like any activity, gaming should be done in moderation. It should not replace interaction with real people *or* interfere with homework, chores, or other responsibilities. (See video game recommendations on page 106.)

Logophile

in-ter-ac-tive adjective: involving direct communication between a computerized device and the person using it

2. **Brain Boost.** Talking to someone you trust about your sadness, anger, or pain, or writing about your feelings in a journal can actually make the feelings less intense. This is because when you put feelings into words, you're activating a response in a calm part

of your brain (the *prefrontal cortex*) and reducing the response in your brain’s “crisis center” (the *amygdala*). You’re basically hitting the brakes on your emotional responses.

3. **Brain Boost.** A recent study of kids and their daily electronic communication habits found that, contrary to many parents’ fears, chatting online and through text messages with friends is usually harmless. And it is becoming socially necessary. By participating in these activities (again, in moderation), you are gaining knowledge and skills you’ll need to succeed in the future, such as: how to express yourself in writing, how to communicate with others, how to manage a public identity, and how to use technology. *Tip:* Offer to share your technical skills with your parents. They didn’t grow up with the same technology and might not understand it very well.
4. **Brain Drain.** What you eat has a huge impact on how you think and feel. Eating or drinking things that have a lot of sugar, caffeine, or fat might make you feel good at first, but it’s temporary. Your energy level will rise quickly and then crash quickly, too. The last thing you need while you’re taking a test or working on an assignment is to fall asleep at your desk! If you want to take care of your brain, make sure the things you put into your body are healthy for you.

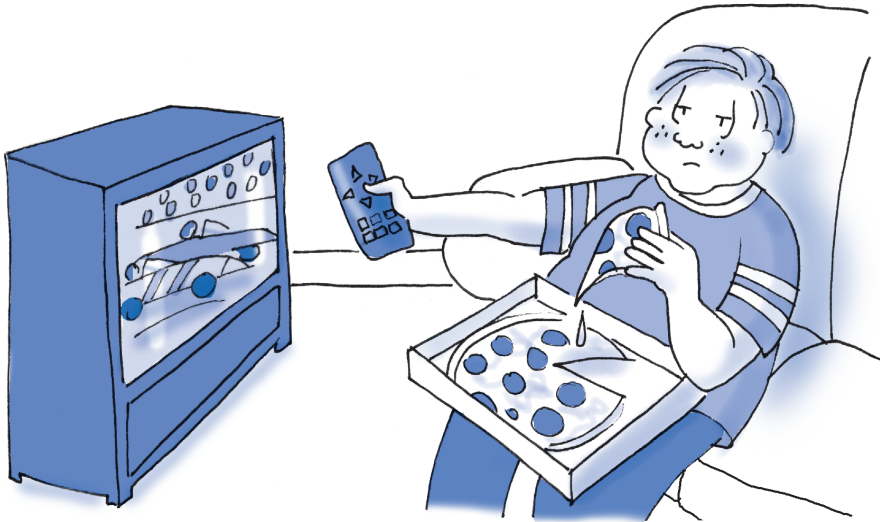


**Check
It!**

Choose My Plate Blast Off Game

In this free interactive computer game, you can reach Planet Power by fueling your rocket with food and exercise. “Fuel tanks” for each food group help you keep track of how your choices fit into a healthy diet.

www.choosemyplate.gov/children-over-five.html

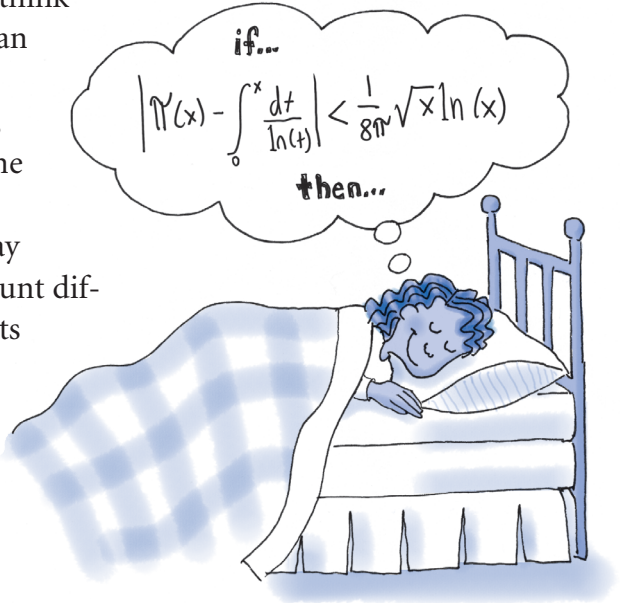


5. **Brain Drain.** Watching television is often a brain drain, but it doesn't have to be. It all depends on what shows you watch and how much you watch them. Think about shows you learn from versus shows that are merely entertainment. It's okay to sometimes watch TV just for fun, but if most of what you watch is mindless, or if you're sitting in front of the tube eight hours a day, you're not helping yourself or your brain. Limit your TV watching, and talk to your parent, teachers, and friends to see what shows they think boost brainpower.
6. **Brain Drain.** It might be tempting to think that taking one of your friend's pills might make you feel good. After all, your friend takes them and seems to feel better, right? But drugs can have *very* different effects on people. For that reason, you should never take anything without your mom or dad's (and sometimes your doctor's) permission. You could seriously harm your brain and your body by taking a drug that isn't right for you. It is not worth the risk.
7. **Brain Boost.** Dancing is exercise, and exercise is a natural way to improve your mind and your mood. It gets extra oxygen flowing to every part of your body, which helps keep everything "breathing" and working well. (*Note:* your brain uses a full 20 percent of all the oxygen you breathe in, so exercise is especially good for it.)

Plus, listening to music while you're exercising can be an extra brain boost, since music also has beneficial effects on your brain.

8. Brain Drain. Do you think

you need less sleep than others because you're gifted? If you said yes, you're wrong. Everyone needs an adequate amount of sleep to stay healthy, and that amount differs by age. Most adults need about 8 hours, but experts recommend that a kid your age gets at least 10 to 11 hours of sleep per night for your brain to perform its best. If that seems like a lot, keep in mind that your brain continues working and problem-solving even while you sleep.



9. Brain Boost. Playing a musical instrument can not only boost your brain, but can also boost your test scores. A Harvard Medical School study showed that playing an instrument boosted kids' verbal scores by 15 percent, and nonverbal scores by 10 percent. The longer the musical training, the higher the scores.

10. Brain Drain. There's a lot to be said for spending time alone, doing your own thing—especially if that thing is a brain boost like reading or listening to music. But when you spend *too* much time alone, it becomes a brain drain. Some gifted kids who isolate say they just prefer to be alone, but it's probably also because they don't have a lot of skills at making friends. They are, in fact, lonely, which is different from wanting to have time to yourself. Being with people, especially those who you like and trust, enriches your life *and* your brain.