



# STARS

My amazing brain

Handbook on Children's Brain Health



 **Brain Health  
Scotland**

Hosted & supported by  
**Alzheimer Scotland**

YOUR CHILD'S BRAIN  
IS AMAZING.

LET'S KEEP IT THAT  
WAY.



At Brain Health Scotland our mission is to inspire and empower everyone to protect their brain health and reduce their risk of diseases that lead to dementia.

We work with all ages, across the whole of Scotland, to provide all you need to protect your brain and to join the effort to understand more about this amazing part of who you are.



## WHAT IS BRAIN HEALTH?

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We now understand a great deal more about what impacts our brain health than we did even ten years ago. For example, it is widely known that the diseases that lead to dementia start in midlife.

The onset of these diseases is driven by many factors, some of which we cannot change, such as our family history and genetics, but many of which we can, such as our lifestyle.

By looking after our brains throughout our life, we can make sure that we still have lots of strong connections, even as we age.

There are as many connections between brain cells as stars in the galaxy!

# Protect brain health, the STARS way!



## S Spend time with friends and on hobbies

Chatting with friends or learning new skills grows new connections between brain cells. Learning doesn't just happen in school, children can learn through fun things such as games and crafts.



## T Tuck in!

Our brain uses up to a fifth of the energy from the food that we eat. By eating regular, healthy meals your child's brain can be working its best throughout the day.



## A Active and healthy

Moving our bodies makes more blood pump to our brain, giving it a boost. Substances such as alcohol, smoking or vaping can have long-term effects on the brain, especially in young people.



## R Rest and relax

Our brain recharges and "cleans" itself while we sleep, so it is important your child is getting enough Zzzs. Also, too much stress or anxiety can have a negative impact on their brain.



## S Safety

Brain injuries can have a long-term impact. It is important to encourage sports as they have so many benefits, but make sure your child is wearing appropriate protection such as a helmet.

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## Spend time with friends after school

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It's great if your child can spend time with friends outside of the school setting where they can further develop friendships.

Conversations with friends help grow connections in their brains, improve communication skills, and promote good mental health.

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## Find local free activities

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There may be free or cheap activities near you — sometimes it's all about looking in the right place.

Some schools provide clubs or musical instrument lessons. There may be a local Scouts or Brownies group, and many museums and galleries in Scotland are free.

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## Find out more:

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- **The Big Noise:** Free music classes  
🌐 [makeabignoise.org.uk](http://makeabignoise.org.uk)
- **CoderDojo:** Free coding club  
🌐 [coderdojoscotland.com](http://coderdojoscotland.com)
- **All about Friends:** Book by Felicity Brooks, explores different types of friendships (try your local library)

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## SPEND TIME WITH FRIENDS AND ON HOBBIES

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## Observe what excites them

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It's easier to encourage your child if they can find something that genuinely interests them. Observe your child's interests, is there a topic they continually talk about?

Why not start a family hobby? It could be as simple as weekend family walks or growing vegetables.



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## What is healthy food?

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Getting your child to eat healthily can be hard! It's all about eating more of the stuff which is good for us: vegetables, fruit, lentils, beans, and good fats like olive oil, seeds, and fish. And then trying to eat less of the food that isn't as good: processed foods and take-aways. Check out some easy recipes on p13-15!

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## Get your child cooking

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Research shows that including children in cooking increases their intake of vegetables! It can be messy and take longer, but they will be more interested in their food.

Offer some prepped vegetables to snack on while they are waiting — you might be surprised what a hungry kid will eat!



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## TUCK IN!

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## Budget healthy eating

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Eating healthily doesn't have to be more expensive:

- Cook in bulk and freeze
- Plan meals to not waste food
- Use frozen vegetables
- Check out Jack Monroe's recipes [🌐 cookingonabootstrap.com](http://cookingonabootstrap.com)
- Get creative with leftovers
- Look out for offers

4

## Find out more:

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- **The Parent Club:** Recipes and tips [🌐 parentclub.scot](http://parentclub.scot)
- **Health for Kids:** Games and info [🌐 healthforkids.co.uk](http://healthforkids.co.uk)
- **NHS Food Scanner App:** Scan items to find healthier swaps

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## Spend time outside after school

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Your child may not be getting all the exercise they need in school but there are lots of opportunities at home.

Encourage your child to get outside and play after school and on the weekends. Find out if there are any local safe parks or go for a walk together.

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## Find local free activities

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Join social media or parents' groups to find out what free activities may be happening in your area.

Check out community boards in supermarkets and libraries for activities, and some sports shops will even have posters of local groups you can join.

4

## Find out more:

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- **PE with Joe:** Check out his workouts on YouTube!
- **Talk About Vaping:** Free guide [🌐 TalkAboutVaping.org](https://www.talkaboutvaping.org)
- **AllTrails:** Find easy hikes near you [🌐 alltrails.com](https://www.alltrails.com)

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## ACTIVE AND HEALTHY

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## Move more and sit less

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The end goal is to move more and sit less, this can be as easy as:

- A family home workout or yoga
- Walk to school once a week or month
- Ditch the car for short journeys
- Do star jumps every advert break or end of an episode



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## Make sure they get enough sleep

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It is important that we all get enough sleep — for children this will vary from 10-12 hours depending on their exact age.

Not all kids need the exact same bedtime, some could go a little later and sleep in a little later. Find out what works best for your child!

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## Sleep "hygiene"

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Is your child's room set up for a good night's sleep? Simple things can improve sleep — turning off the hallway light, making sure the room is the right temperature and dark.

Using screens before sleep can make it harder to drift off. Introduce a screen-free rule one hour before bed.



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## REST AND RELAX

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## Talk about feelings

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Kids now understand terms such as "stress" and "anxiety" and are doing mindfulness and meditation in school! Why not also try it at home?

Talk about how they are feeling. It's normal to feel stressed or anxious some of the time, but if it seems too much you could check with your healthcare provider.

4

## Find out more:

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- **Sleep Scotland:** Sleep advice  
🌐 [sleepscotland.org](https://www.sleepscotland.org)
- **The Sleep Charity:** Sleep advice  
🌐 [thesleepcharity.org.uk](https://www.thesleepcharity.org.uk)
- **mindful:** Step-by-step guide  
🌐 [mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids](https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids)



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## Wear a helmet

Everyone should wear a helmet when doing activities where there is a risk of banging their head, to protect against skull fractures.

Make sure the helmet is the right size (measure the circumference of their head), complies with safety standards, and sits two fingers depth above their eyebrows.

2

## Encourage them to tell you

Encourage your child to tell you if they have knocked their head, even if they were wearing a helmet. Kids may not think to say anything, and brain injuries can be missed.

If you think your child has banged their head, check with your GP or call 111.

4

## Find out more:

- **If In Doubt, Sit Them Out:**  
Campaign by sportscotland  
[🌐 sportscotland.org.uk](https://www.sportscotland.org.uk)
- **How to Measure Helmet Size:**  
[🌐 wikihow.com/Measure-Helmet-Size](https://www.wikihow.com/Measure-Helmet-Size)
- **NHS Advice on Head Injury:**  
[🌐 nhs.uk/conditions/head-injury-and-concussion/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/head-injury-and-concussion/)

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## SAFETY

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## If in doubt, sit them out

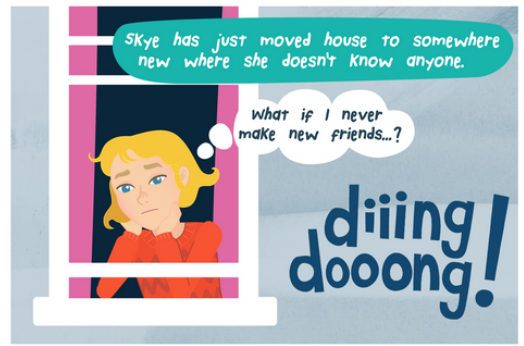
If your child knocks their head while playing sports and seems like they have a brain injury or concussion, it's important that they sit out for the rest of the game or practice.

If it's particularly bad, they shouldn't play for a few weeks to allow their brain time to recover.



# STARS

My amazing brain





## LOOKING AFTER YOUR OWN BRAIN HEALTH

**All the things you can do to help your child's brain health, you can also do for yourself.**

**It's never too late to start – think of it like saving into a "brain health pension" that protects you in future.**



Why not make a family brain health promise?

Use your fridge magnet to decide on a brain health promise together as a family. Once you've conquered it, set yourself another challenge!

It's not about being perfect at everything, little changes add up and make a big difference.

Check out our website [brainhealth.scot](https://brainhealth.scot) where you can:

- Complete our Brain Health Quiz that will provide you with a personal plan
- Join Dementia Research
- Keep up to date on how Brain Health Scotland is making Scotland a brain healthier place



Here are some "brain healthy" recipes for you to try from Parent Club. Check out [parentclub.scot/recipes](http://parentclub.scot/recipes) for loads more!

## SPICY LENTIL AND VEGETABLE CASSEROLE



**Preparation:** 15 mins

**Cooking:** 60 mins

**Serves:** 4, costs under £3.00\*

### Ingredients

- 2 Medium Sized (300g) Onions
- 2 Medium Sized (160g) Carrots
- 1 (160g) Leek
- 2 Tablespoons (20ml) Vegetable Oil
- 4 Large Sized (800g) Potatoes
- 2 Frozen Tablespoons (60g) Peas
- 2 Frozen Tablespoons (60g) Sweetcorn
- 1 Tins (400g) Chopped Tomatoes
- 2 Tablespoons (30g) Tomato Puree
- 1 Cups (200g) Red Lentils
- 1 Teaspoons (2g) Mixed Herbs
- 1 Teaspoons (2g) Chilli Powder
- 2 Cups (200ml) Water
- 1 Pinch (1g) Ground Black Pepper

### Method

1. Turn oven on to 160°C / 140°C fan oven / 320°F / gas mark 3. Slice the onions, carrots and leeks and dice the potatoes.
2. Heat the oil on a hob in a large pan, fry the onions and leeks until golden.
3. Add all the other vegetables and potatoes and stir in the tomato puree and tomatoes.
4. Rinse the lentils and add to pan with water, herbs, chilli powder and pepper.
5. Bring to boil and then simmer on a low heat for 10 minutes.
6. Transfer to an ovenproof dish, cook in oven for 30-40 minutes, then serve.

## BEAN AND VEGETABLE HOT POT



**Preparation:** 10 mins

**Cooking:** 30 mins

**Serves:** 4, costs under £3.00\*

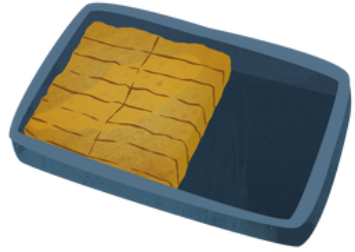
### Ingredients

- 2 Medium Sized (300g) Onions
- 2 Large Sized (280g) Carrots
- 2 Tablespoons (20ml) Vegetable Oil
- 4 Large Sized (800g) Potatoes
- 1 Reduced Salt and Sugar Tins (400g) Baked Beans
- 1 Tins (400g) Red Kidney Beans
- 2 Tablespoons (30g) Tomato Puree
- 1 Tins (400g) Chopped Tomatoes
- 4 Teaspoons (4g) Mixed Herbs
- 1 Pinch (1g) Ground Black Pepper

### Method

1. Turn oven on to 200°C / 180°C fan oven / 400°F / gas mark 6.
2. Wash potatoes and boil in their skins until cooked through. Leave to cool then slice.
3. Chop onions finely then fry in oil until golden brown.
4. Wash and slice carrots and add to the onions. Then stir in tomato puree, add baked beans, chopped tomatoes and mixed herbs.
5. Drain and rinse kidney beans and add to the pan. Bring to boil and then simmer on a low heat for 10-15 minutes.
6. Transfer to an ovenproof dish and top with sliced potatoes.
7. Cook in oven for around 30 minutes until the potatoes have crisped.

# APPLE FLAPJACK



**Preparation:** 15 mins

**Cooking:** 20 mins

**Serves:** 4, costs under £1.00\*

## Ingredients

- 1 Cup (112g) Porridge Oats
- 5 Tablespoons (70g) Low Fat Spread
- 1 Tablespoon (25g) Golden Syrup
- 1 Tablespoon (20g) Sugar
- 1 Heaped Spoonful Tablespoon (30g) Plain Flour
- 1 (20g) Apple

## Method

1. Turn oven on to 180°C / 160°C fan oven / 350°F / gas mark 4. Peel, then finely chop or grate apple.
2. Melt low fat spread in a pan over a low heat.
3. Add sugar and syrup to the pan and continue to heat gently until sugar dissolves.
4. Take pan off heat and mix in the apple, flour and porridge oats.
5. Place mixture in a greased baking tray and spread the mixture so it is approximately 2 cm thick, smooth with the back of a spoon.
6. Bake in the oven for 15-20 minutes until golden around the edges. Remove from the oven and leave to cool, then cut into portions while still warm.

### \* Cost Disclaimer

Please note the cost per serving may be slightly higher due to rising prices in supermarkets.



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**BRODIES**<sup>LLP</sup>

Thanks to Brodies LLP (brodies.com) for their generous support of the *My Amazing Brain* Pilot.

[brainhealth.scot/myamazingbrain](https://brainhealth.scot/myamazingbrain)

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