

Crafts and DIY

Knitting, sewing, pottery, jewelry making, embroidery, DIY, woodworking, and other hands-on, creative hobbies promote cognitive health. You can help keep your brain in shape simply by integrating these activities into your day-to-day routine. On your marks, set, create!



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1. The brain benefits of doing crafts and DIY projects

CRAFTY HANDS, HEALTHY BRAIN!

Whether you're a beginner or an experienced crafter, creativity revs up your brain's grey matter! Handicrafts like pottery, knitting, and cabinetmaking stimulate many **areas of the brain**.

Simple actions such as using knitting needles or a hammer, cutting cardboard or fabric with scissors, and drawing plans and patterns all require attention and precision. They involve both **concentration and fine dexterity** (i.e., finger agility).

The benefits of manual hobbies in a nutshell

In addition to helping cultivate manual skills that are useful in everyday life (making or repairing clothes, crockery, furniture, etc.), regularly doing craftwork and DIY activities contributes to the following:

- Stimulating memory, fine motor skills, attention, and planning skills
- Protecting the brain from the effects of aging
- Reducing the risk of developing cognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's disease

Understanding and following a plan or pattern really puts the brain to work! This type of exercise involves the ability to visualize (we “see” the steps in the process in our mind’s eye) and many other cognitive functions related to **memory, planning, problem solving, and reasoning**. In short, crafts and DIY projects train your brain!

Scientific studies even suggest that creative and manual hobbies can **help prevent cognitive decline**. They’re believed to help reduce the effects of aging on the brain, or of those caused by diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

BUSY HANDS, ZEN MIND!

When we engage in a pleasurable activity, the brain’s reward centre releases a kind of natural anti-depressant called dopamine, also known as the “pleasure hormone.” Consequently, being lulled by the sound of needles clicking or moulding clay with your hands **may help promote a sense of well-being**.

Working on a creative project allows you to take a break from your day and forget about your worries, at least for a while. And completing a project is supremely satisfying! There’s nothing like sitting back and admiring your handiwork, or receiving praise from a loved one, to spur you on to the next project!

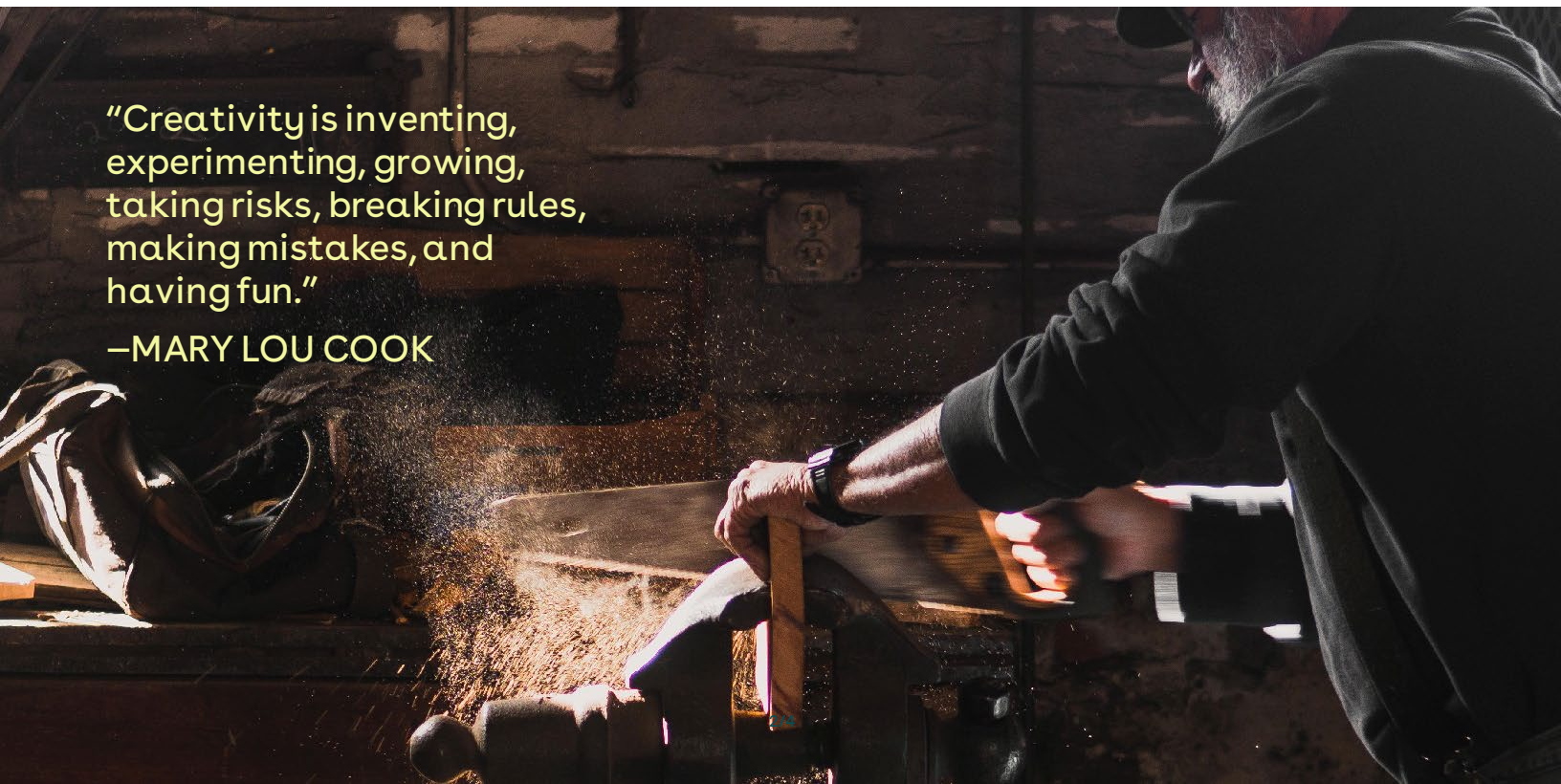


Keeping your brain in shape with creative activities

🕒 3 min.

“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.”

—MARY LOU COOK



2. FAQs on getting started

I'm a beginner. Where do I start?

Start with a class or watch online tutorials (we particularly recommend those created by home improvement stores). You can also check out what activities your municipality offers. Even if you lack skill at the moment, don't let that stop you. You'll improve bit by bit. And if you end up knitting a sweater with uneven sleeves or building a lopsided bird feeder, just appreciate them for being the uniquely goofy items they are!

I have trouble staying motivated and finishing projects. What can I do?

- Join a group dedicated to your chosen activity. There are lots of craft and hobby clubs out there! Don't forget that social interactions also nourish the brain.
- Pencil the activity into your agenda. Choose a time of day when you generally feel good mentally and physically.
- Set a deadline for completing the project—for example, by Christmas or your youngest grandchild's birthday. You could also turn the project into a gift. An embroidered scarf, winter socks, a flower vase, earrings, a birdhouse, a cat condo . . . There are so many possibilities. Even if the result is less than perfect, it's the thought that counts, right?

Need some ideas? Here are just a few:

- Build a [car track](#) out of recycled cardboard for the children in your neighbourhood.
- Make candles from scratch. They're a great last-minute gift for a host!
- Fashion a [reusable macramé bag](#) for running errands.
- Set up a homemade tool organizer. This one's perfect if you're a tidy—or not so tidy!—weekend do-it-yourselfer.

What if I'm looking for a challenge?

- Participate in a contest or an art show.
- Add a layer of complexity to the project: make a quilt for a double bed instead of a twin, a dollhouse with two storeys instead of one, etc.
- Volunteer your services at a nearby organization. Sharing your knowledge with others and getting involved in your community are also brain-boosting activities!

I'm on a tight budget. What are my options?

Recycle old clothes, take out the stash of wool gathering dust in your closet, rummage through your son's garage for scraps of wood, borrow tools from a friend, or find a shop that rents tools or equipment. Some community organizations also loan tools.

Looking for a workspace, tools, or expertise?

Set up [your own workshop](#) or join a community workshop to meet people, borrow tools, learn new techniques, or share your skills.

3. Further reading



[Tips and tricks for incorporating creative activities into your daily routine](#)



DeSerres Creative Space. "[Free as art: Self-care through creative expression.](#)" Text by Manon Lavoie.



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