

REMEMBER WHEN BEING A NERD was about as cool as wearing socks with sandals? Well, times have changed. Not only is it bang on-trend to keep your toes warm in Birkenstocks, those straight-A students who never stopped learning are getting the last laugh when it comes to brilliant brain health, emotional wellbeing, creativity and even fitness.

Yes, it's the ultimate revenge of the nerds – but don't worry, it's not too late to get your geek on, whether you were a bona fide smarty pants at school or not. Here are five compelling reasons to hit the books as a grown-up.

Lesson #1

IT KEEPS YOUR MIND SHARP

Studying is Pump class for your mind. Scientists at the University of Texas tasked 221 adults with different activities over three months – some learnt quilting, photography or both, others did puzzles or listened to classical music. They found that only the groups engaged in mentally stimulating activities showed improvements in memory.

“When you are inside your comfort zone you may be outside of the enhancement zone,” says the study's lead researcher Denise Park. So if you suspect your grey matter is slowly turning to mush, take those French classes you always wanted to try.

Lesson #2

IT COMBATS STRESS

Learning something new can wash away the cares of the day in a way Nina and her *Offspring* crew can't.

Music teacher Sam Reynolds from Reynolds & Co says many of his adult students come to lessons for stress relief. “Playing music helps you resolve feelings, and not only when you're stressed,” he says. “It helps express happiness as well.”

Going to classes also forces you to clock off from daily hassles. Chester Garcia, co-founder of creative learning hub Work-Shop, says, “A lot of people who come to our classes are just looking to disconnect from technology for two or three hours.” The reward? A new skill and a digital detox.



WORDS PENNY CARROLL PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES

BACK TO school

Nerd alert! Find out why heading back to the classroom is one of the best things you can do for your mind and body

Lesson #3

IT KEEPS YOU HEALTHY

Forget the stereotype of the weak-but-smart brainiac: research shows adults who continually learn are more likely to be healthier and fitter than their less-studious counterparts. “People who continually learn are generally in better health,” says Sally Thompson, CEO at Adult Learning Australia. “And a lot of learning is about your health and looking after your wellbeing.”

The ripple effect of education has an awesome physical impact: Research from the UK shows that new-skills loving adults are more likely to exercise, quit smoking and have greater life satisfaction.

The good news is, any schooling will do. “You don't have to be learning Mandarin, it could be a new form of cooking,” says Thompson. “That also has real value for your mind, health and wellbeing.”

Lesson #4

IT MAKES YOU BETTER ON THE JOB

Looking for a light bulb moment at work? You're more likely to spark a bright idea if you have a creative hobby outside the office. A study by San Francisco State University showed that people who engage in creative activities, such as painting, playing music or writing in their downtime, are better problem solvers during their nine-to-five.

“I think creating something from an idea in your head to something tangible in your hands unleashes that adventurous spirit,” explains Garcia.

But it's not just about tapping into your own well of creativity. Thompson says learning allows you to connect with inspiring minds. “It puts you in contact with new ideas and new ways of looking at the world.”

Plus, research shows that learning extra skills, such as music or a second language, makes you a better multitasker, decision-maker, listener and empathiser. Hello, CV upgrade!

Lesson #5

IT MAKES YOU HAPPY

Easily the biggest bonus of all – learning will put a massive smile on your dial. It's even been pinpointed as one of the five keys to happiness by British think-tank New Economics Foundation. Why? Not only is it fun to expand your knowledge, discuss complex ideas, create art and make cool new friends in the process, it's guaranteed to improve your self-esteem.

“I would probably put it in the top three [keys to happiness],” says Garcia, “just in terms of fulfilment and developing yourself. When you learn something new, you feel an amazing sense of accomplishment. There's a joy and a feeling of pride that you get from that.”

THE MIND GYM

Check out these fun classes to train your brain



Fashion illustration

Learn to paint beautiful images of your favourite designer threads at an Etsy

masterclass in watercolour fashion illustration at Work-Shop's Sydney or Melbourne locations. Visit work-shop.com.au for more info.



iPhone mastery

Upgrade your Instagram with this cool iPhone photography workshop in Brisbane. Learn how to make the most of your

phone's camera and editing options so you can take awesome pictures, #nofilterrequired. Visit takebetterphotos.com.au



Creative cobbling

Why buy shoes when you can make your own? Enrol in a six-week shoe-making

course and create a pair of slippers even Cinderella would be proud of. Sign up at schooloffootwear.com



Superfood cookery

Get hot tips from a chef on how to power up every meal and drink with superfoods

at this healthy course in Perth. Get all the details at thecookingprofessor.com.au



Recording prowess

Reckon you've got a hit in you? Learn how to turn your computer into a recording

studio to get one step closer to your big break. Check out reynoldsandco.com.au



Let's get classy! Hunt down a fun course in your hood by heading to ala.asn.au/ find-a-course. It could be the neuron-building workout your brain is craving