problem-solving ability and creates novelty in a positive way. Outdoor exercise, whether in the form of gardening, hiking, bicycling, or some other physical activity, has a powerful mood-boosting effect.

Playing with pets, enjoying down-time, and connecting with those in need are all ways to give the brain as well as social networks a positive boost. Challenging the brain by reading inspiring and mentally challenging books increases the brain’s ability to solve problems and handle stress.

Taking time to nourish the brain with plenty of fresh fruits, whole grains, vegetables, beans and nuts provides nutrition that is essential for balancing mood, curbing cravings, and boosting brain power.

Replacing caffeinated drinks, alcohol, and nicotine with water and healthy beverages increases mental and physical endurance while eliminating the extreme highs and lows associated with those substances.

Most importantly, the Bible teaches that God is a personal and steadfast Friend “who sticks closer than a brother,” and His presence, power, and plan for living are available to every person who turns to Him for help in times of need.

*Information taken from Living Free: Finding Freedom from Habits that Hurt. For more information, call 1-866-624-5433, or visit Lifestylematters.com.

### Endnotes

1 Are you stressed out? In a daze? You may be watching too much TELEVISION. Atlanta Constitution, April 30, 1990. (Review of book cited in note 5).
5 Ibid.
6 Television addiction is no mere metaphor. Kubey R, Csikszentmihalyi M. Scientific American 2002 Feb/77.
9 Ibid.
12 Ibid. p. 200.
“absorbed or sucked their energy, leaving them depleted.” Pat’s TV habit left her too tired and depressed to engage in other activities.

One reason for this is that TV, for the most part, is a passive activity for the brain. As Jeff Victoroff, MD, author of Saving Your Brain, notes: “Here’s where we come to the crucial point about mental stimulation and the brain: passive experience does little for the adult brain. To keep the brain learning and growing, we need to generate active responses to cognitive challenges.” Put simply: TV does little or nothing for brain growth.

But according to neurology researcher Dr. Antonio Damasio, TV does something for the brain: it increases the risk of emotional neutrality because the brain is barraged with too much input. This happens because the information center of the brain receives and processes data at a much faster pace than the emotional center does.

On the news, for instance, it’s not uncommon to see horrific scenes of brutality and bloodshed while basketball scores and stock market figures run simultaneously at the bottom of the screen. “The image of an event or a person can appear in a flash,” Damasio says, “but it takes seconds to make an emotional marking which means that you could potentially become ethically less grounded. You’d be in an emotionally neutral world.”

Victoroff agrees: “Things are shown one after another. No matter how terrifying, images are shown so briefly that we have no time to sense emotionally the horror of a particular event.”

In his book, Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment, psychiatrist Richard Winter cites another potent pitfall of television viewing. The ultimate goal of TV programs is ratings: ratings attract advertisers, and advertisers bring revenue. So, bottom line, TV is about advertising, not information, and entertainment is the means to accomplish the all-important end—advertising revenue.

As a result, by the age of 20, many viewers have seen more than 1 million commercials. And what do they learn from these commercials? “Children learn that they are the most important person in the universe,” Winter writes, “that impulses should not be denied, that pain should not be tolerated and that the cure for any kind of pain is a product. They learn a weird mix of dissatisfaction and entitlement. With the message of ads, we are socializing our children to be self-centered, impulsive, and addicted.”

Author Henry Lebalme agrees: “Oddly, this overload of stimulation, information, advertising, and entertainment has produced an unexpected result: boredom. When stimulation comes at us from every side, we reach a point where we cannot respond with much depth to anything…We tend to become unable to discriminate and choose from among the many options. The result is that we shut down our attention to everything.”

But that’s not the only aspect of television that affects the attention of children and adults. The ability to pay attention and focus on a task is an internal choice. But television artificially manipulates the brain into paying attention by violating certain of its natural defenses with flashing images, sudden close-ups, and invasive sounds (called saliency). These all alert the novelty, reward, and fear centers of the brain of impending danger. And that keeps you watching—it forces you to pay attention—whether you want to or not, which may contribute to hyperactivity, frustration, and irritability.

Television, when rightly used, can be a source of education, information, entertainment, and even relaxation. Good programs are produced on science, history, nature, religion, art, and human interest. These types of programs can provide a nice occasional diversion and stimulate interest in a new area of study. But higher learning takes place as a result of active mental exertion, which television generally does not stimulate.

This is the trap that Pat found herself in. She recognized that her dependence on television was robbing her of needed social connections and was leaving her more depressed and fatigued as a result. She attended a Living Free seminar on how to break free from behavioral addictions and found positive tools for breaking out of the cycle she was in.

“I went to the seminar and purchased the book Living Free because I knew I needed help. After implementing the spiritual and lifestyle tools in the program, I now feel I have a life again. I enjoy gardening and walking; I have more time to read good books, visit my neighbors and get involved in community projects—I feel that I am growing spiritually stronger and am more able to handle life’s daily problems without resorting to easy escapes. I take better care of my health, and finally enjoy life again.” (Pat’s testimony and picture are featured in the Living Free book)

What are some great alternatives to TV? Getting together with friends and family in positive social gatherings boosts brain hormones associated with well-being and happiness.

Engaging in some challenging new task, project, or hobby increases overall