

★WELCOA's
News & Views

KEEPING YOUR
BRAIN
YOUNG

Expert Interview with Kip Johnson

★ WELCOA's News & Views

Keeping Your Brain Young

with
KIP JOHNSON

ABOUT **DR. KIP JOHNSON, M.D.**



**PREVENTIVE HEALTH PHYSICIAN,
PERSONAL WELLNESS CORPORATION & THE NUTRILITE HEALTH INSTITUTE**

For two decades, Dr. Kip Johnson has researched nutrient supplements from manufacturing and production to efficacy and usage. He has lectured extensively on Preventative Medicine and on natural ways of restoring health. He has spoken to many local communities, as well as to health-oriented groups such as the Orange County Wellness Coalition and Valley Wellness Association and for major corporations including Nutrilite, Beckman, Unocal, Boeing, and Taco Bell Corporate. He has also given a number of seminars internationally on a wide variety of topics. Over the last several years, he has also developed a cutting edge and unique approach to weight management that is likely to change the direction of the entire industry.

Dr. Johnson was born and raised in Idaho. He was admitted with Honors at Entrance to UCLA and graduated with a BA in Zoology. He attended and received his M.D. from the UCLA School of Medicine. Dr. Johnson is a contributing author to *The Complete Book of Baby & Child Care* by Focus on The Family and is the primary author of a new book detailing his unique approach to weight management.

ABOUT **RYAN PICARELLA, MS, SPHR**



As President of WELCOA, Ryan works with communities and organizations around the country to ignite social movements that will improve the lives of all working people in America and around the world. With a deep interest in culture and sociology, Ryan approaches initiatives from a holistic perspective that recognizes the many paths to well-being that must be in alignment for long-term healthy lifestyle behavior change. Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight to WELCOA from his background in psychology and a career that spans human resources, organizational development and wellness program and product design. Prior to joining WELCOA, Ryan managed the award winning BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST) Well@Work employee wellness program, a 2012 C. Everett Koop honorable mention awardee. Since relocating to Nebraska, Ryan has enjoyed an active role in the community, currently serving on the Board for the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition in Omaha. Ryan has a Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Northern Arizona University.

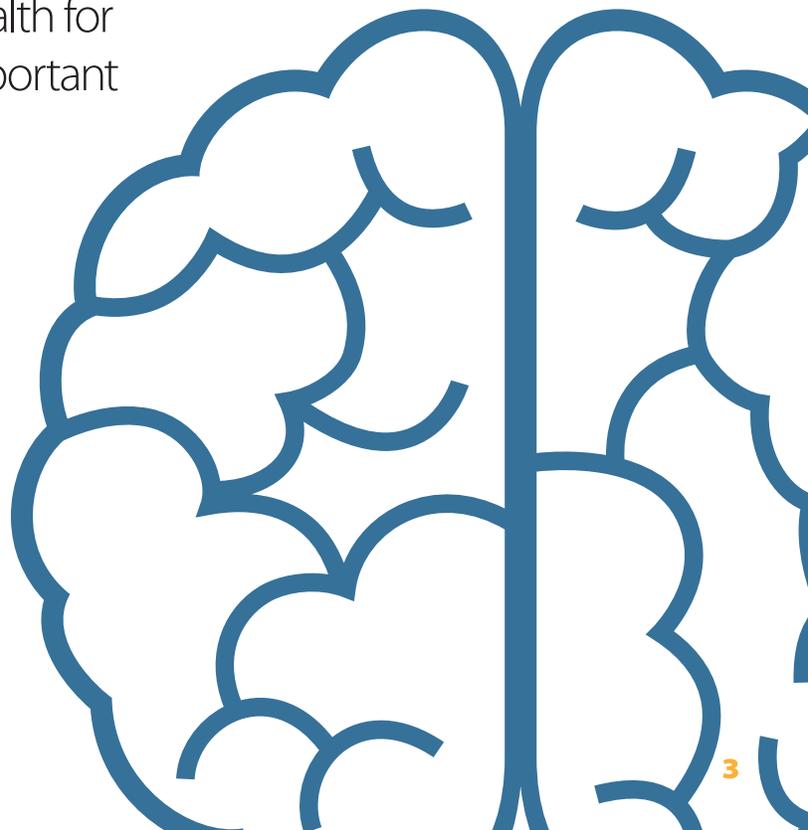
WELCOA President Ryan Picarella sits down with Dr. Kip Johnson, M.D. of Personal Wellness Corporation to discuss what environmental factors are increasingly putting us at risk for brain diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia. How can we reduce our chances for acquiring these serious brain disorders, and how does our declining brain health affect our daily lives today—from memory to job performance?



★ First off, I'd like to thank you personally and on behalf of all our WELCOA members for your expert advice and thoughts on the very important topic of brain health. I think many wellness programs overlook this very important component of optimal health. To begin, can you define brain health for us and tell us a little about why it is so important to start thinking about brain health?

KIP JOHNSON: I am happy to have the opportunity to share this important information with WELCOA Members. I agree that brain health is often overlooked; I think often because many people believe that brain health is not as manageable as general physical health, and that any lost function is permanent or irreversible. However, it is the brain that is the source of memory, creativity, logic, reasoning and communication. It is also the source of the expression of mood, fatigue, depression, and frustration. These are all functions that are so important to an employee's job performance—both short and long-term. Brain Health is just the process of helping optimize the function of the brain as well as preventing or delaying degeneration.

“It is the **brain** that is the source of **memory, creativity, logic, reasoning** and **communication**. It is also the source of the **expression** of **mood, fatigue, depression,** and **frustration.**”



★ Shifting gears to talk about how brain health affects us at work, are you aware of any stats linking brain health to job performance and productivity?

KIP JOHNSON: There are numerous studies that have shown that job productivity is reliant not only on improved cognitive performance, but also on emotional performance. Both of these are brain responsibilities.

Recent research on more than 100,000 individuals indicates that working memory and attention tasks are best performed in the morning, while creative performance peaks later in the day. This type of information becomes very useful in scheduling meetings for specific individuals for optimal results.

Other research, also involving more than 100,000 participants, demonstrates that cognitive training significantly reduces age-related decline.

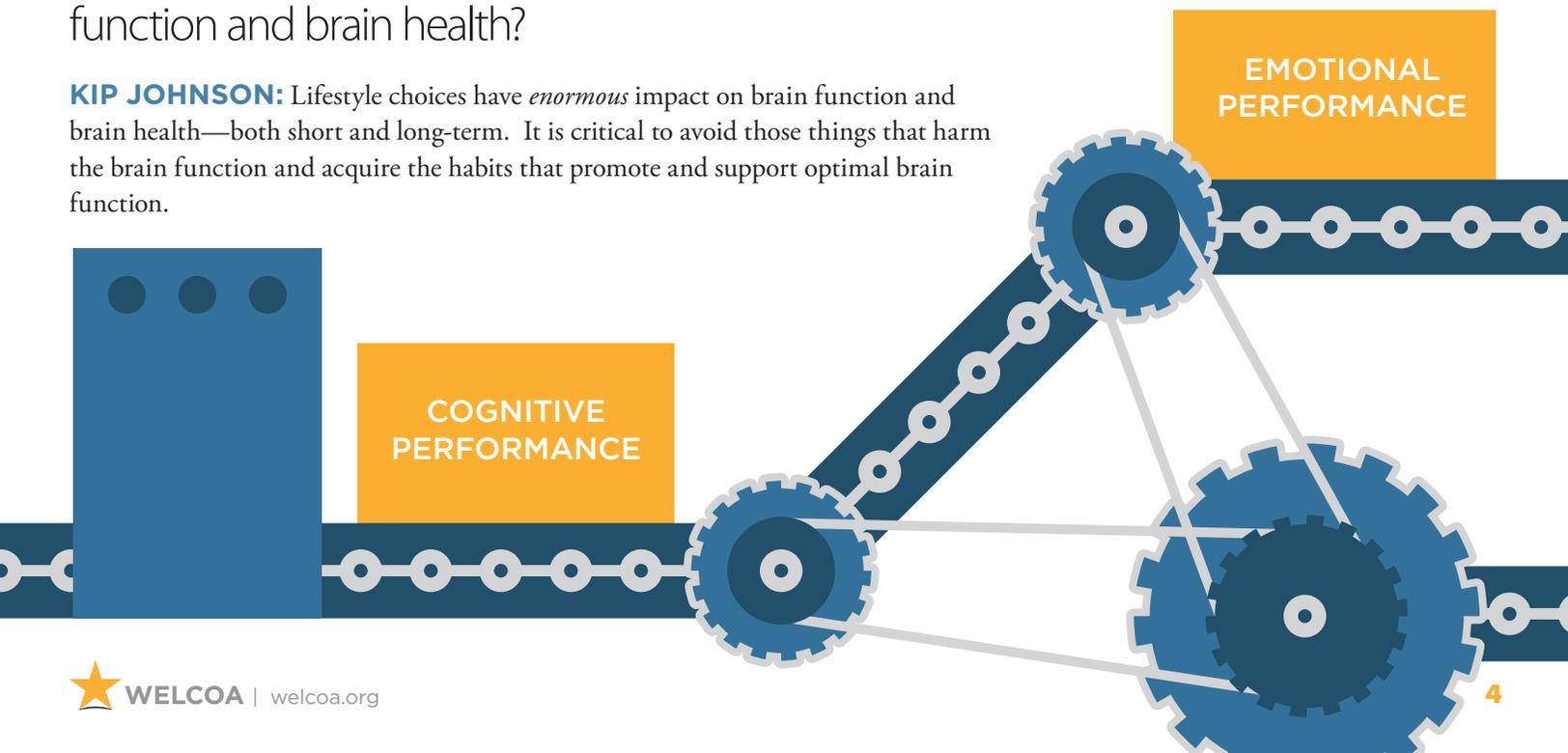
★ Why should leadership at an organization care about brain health?

KIP JOHNSON: Leadership relies on employees using their memories, reasoning, good judgment, and communication skills on a daily basis. The C-Suite also wants employees to use their creativity and efficiency to improve the quality and productivity of the business. In addition, they need employees to support one another and work well together with minimal conflict. All of these improve with optimal functioning of the brain.

★ Can lifestyle choices have an impact on brain function and brain health?

KIP JOHNSON: Lifestyle choices have *enormous* impact on brain function and brain health—both short and long-term. It is critical to avoid those things that harm the brain function and acquire the habits that promote and support optimal brain function.

“There are numerous studies that have shown that job productivity is reliant not only on **improved cognitive performance**, but also on **emotional performance**. Both of these are brain responsibilities.”



★ It seems that we hear a lot more about Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, other dementias, and even Lou Gehrig's disease than what we used to. Is that just due to increased awareness or are they actually more common today, and, if so, why?

KIP JOHNSON: That is a very good observation. Only a generation ago, most neurologists would see one patient with Lou Gehrig's disease in their entire career, and they typically encountered that patient during their training at a University center. Now, most neurologists not only have a number of patients with Lou Gehrig's disease, many of them have friends and relatives with it too. We are seeing not only more patients with Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease and other dementias but also at much younger ages than in the past. It is clear that these increases cannot be just due to genetic changes because this increased frequency is occurring too rapidly for them to be just related to genetics. There are clearly lifestyle and environmental factors that are associated with these striking increases in frequency. Therefore, if we can identify these lifestyle and environmental factors, and correct them, we can reduce our chances of acquiring these serious brain disorders.

★ It is wonderful to know that there are ways of decreasing risk of disease. However, is there anything that can be done to make the brain better now? For example, is there anything that can be done for improving job performance?

KIP JOHNSON: Yes, definitely. First, it is imperative to avoid the things that are decreasing performance. There are many factors that decrease brain function or harm the brain. As one example, many prescription medications have an effect on the brain either by design or as a side effect. Many of these medications can also interfere with the thought process of certain individuals. Some medications are known to actually deplete certain nutrients in the body—some nutrients crucial to optimal brain function.

I have created a comprehensive program for companies called "Keeping the Brain Young—20 Successful Strategies to be Razor Sharp for a Lifetime" that explains in significant detail the factors that harm and the factors that preserve or improve the brain. For example, a very important nutrient for the brain is dietary fats. Every cell in the brain is surrounded by a membrane made of fats. A large

We are seeing not only more patients with Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease and other dementias but also at much younger ages than in the past. It is clear that these **increases cannot be just due to genetic changes** because this increased frequency is **occurring too rapidly for them to be just related to genetics.**"



proportion of the brain tissue is also made of fats. Fats that are flexible improve the communication between cells of the brain and therefore improve brain function. Omega-3 fats, such as DHA in fish oil, are very flexible fats and improve brain function considerably over stiffer fats such as saturated or trans fats.

Lifestyle habits also have a significant impact on brain performance. Many of the neurochemicals that are intimately involved in brain function are manufactured when we are at rest. Therefore, for most people, about 7 ½ hours of sleep per night is important for optimizing the manufacture of these neurochemicals.

A number of other factors, such as exercise and even music, can be modified or maximized to improve job performance. As you are aware, one of the greatest assets of a company is its “brain trust”—the collective creativity, judgment and resourcefulness of its employees. We discovered that organizations using “Keeping Your Brain Young” strategies can gain a competitive edge in the workplace by helping employees become more focused and efficient with younger and better brains.

★ I’ve noticed that my brain function seems to vary depending on the time of day and other factors. For example, after lunch I feel more tired and I don’t feel like I am processing information as well as I did in the morning. What can I do to improve that?

KIP JOHNSON: Again, this is a good observation on your part and actually affects a large number of people. Often this reaction is directly related to what is consumed in the preceding meals such as lunch. For example, many people will consume simple carbohydrates for lunch—such as breads, pastas, potatoes, rice, and sugars such as soft drinks or sweets, all of which cause the blood sugar to rise fairly quickly. The body’s natural response to this is to release insulin which causes the blood sugar to drop—sometimes quickly and sometimes even below the baseline starting point. Since the brain functions most optimally when the blood sugar is in a more stable state in the normal range, these swings and sudden dropping of blood sugar frequently make us feel sleepy or sluggish and decrease alertness and performance. Consuming meals that keep blood sugar from massive swings has the benefit of maximizing performance. These “performance meals” consist of more complex carbohydrates such as whole fruits and vegetables and low-fat protein sources.

A number of other factors, such as **exercise** and even **music**, can be modified or maximized to improve job performance. As you are aware, one of the greatest assets of a company is its **‘brain trust’—the collective creativity, judgment and resourcefulness of its employees.**”



★ Can you actually keep the brain younger and functioning well?

KIP JOHNSON: Yes, you certainly can keep the brain younger and functioning very well for many decades. The first task is to limit all of the lifestyle and environmental factors that harm the brain over time. The next task is to adopt lifestyles that are most helpful to the brain. The final task is to ensure that the brain has all of the nutrients to manufacture and repair all of the many chemicals that are required for optimal function. Utilizing all of these can make a very significant improvement in brain function and can optimize it for many years. The sooner you begin, the better the result.

★ If there is already damage or loss to the brain, can you restore any of the function and recover any loss?

KIP JOHNSON: Yes, you can actually recover some loss and restore some functions of the brain. This is one of the things that distinguishes our complex brains from computers. Our brains have a feature called plasticity where they can actually self-repair or adapt for newly required functions. Two examples are stroke victims who require restoring of function lost with damage to specific areas of the brain and individuals who change careers and require new skills or restoration of skills that haven't been used in many years. In both of these examples, the brain can adapt to respond to new pathways being developed.

★ Can you actually improve memory?

KIP JOHNSON: Many people feel that they have decreased mental function beginning in their late 40s to mid 50s. Much of this sensation has to do with the cumulative effect of years of free radical damage to brain cells as well as to hormonal changes that occur in these age ranges. Many individuals actually become concerned that they are becoming demented or have a degenerative neurological disease.

However, modifications are possible many times to restore normal function or even improve it above what it was previously.

“Our brains have a feature called **plasticity** where they can actually self-repair or adapt for newly required functions.”

★ What if I didn't do any of these things for my brain and now I'm in my 40s or 50s and beginning to experience that decreased mental function that you described. Is it too late?

KIP JOHNSON: It is never too late to preserve and improve what you can. This is the miracle of brain plasticity. You can make and break neural connections throughout your entire lifetime. Repeating and strengthening neural pathways strengthens memory and thought processes. This is the “use it or lose it” principle that applies to a number of functions and tissues in the body. The healthier the brain, the more certain the pathways. Therefore, it is again crucial to supply the proper nutrients including healthy flexible fats, appropriate vitamins, minerals, and cofactors. The sooner you begin, the better the result!

★ What is one thing everyone can do every day to strengthen and improve brain function?

KIP JOHNSON: As mentioned previously, restful sleep is very important for the general health of the brain and a number of brain functions. We were designed to rest. Each individual can gradually learn the optimal amount of time they need to rest to maximize performance and efficiency and then discipline themselves to get that amount of rest. The most common reason that individuals give for not getting enough sleep is that they “don't have enough time” to rest. Far too many individuals in our society try to get by on a minimum of sleep. However, this poor lifestyle habit adversely affects their general performance, efficiency, energy and mood. One of the most important lessons to be learned is that you will be *redeemed back* the time you spend obtaining your optimal amount of rest by improving your efficiency, mood, creativity, and energy.

“It is never too late to preserve and improve what you can. **This is the miracle of brain plasticity.** You can make and break neural connections throughout your entire lifetime.”



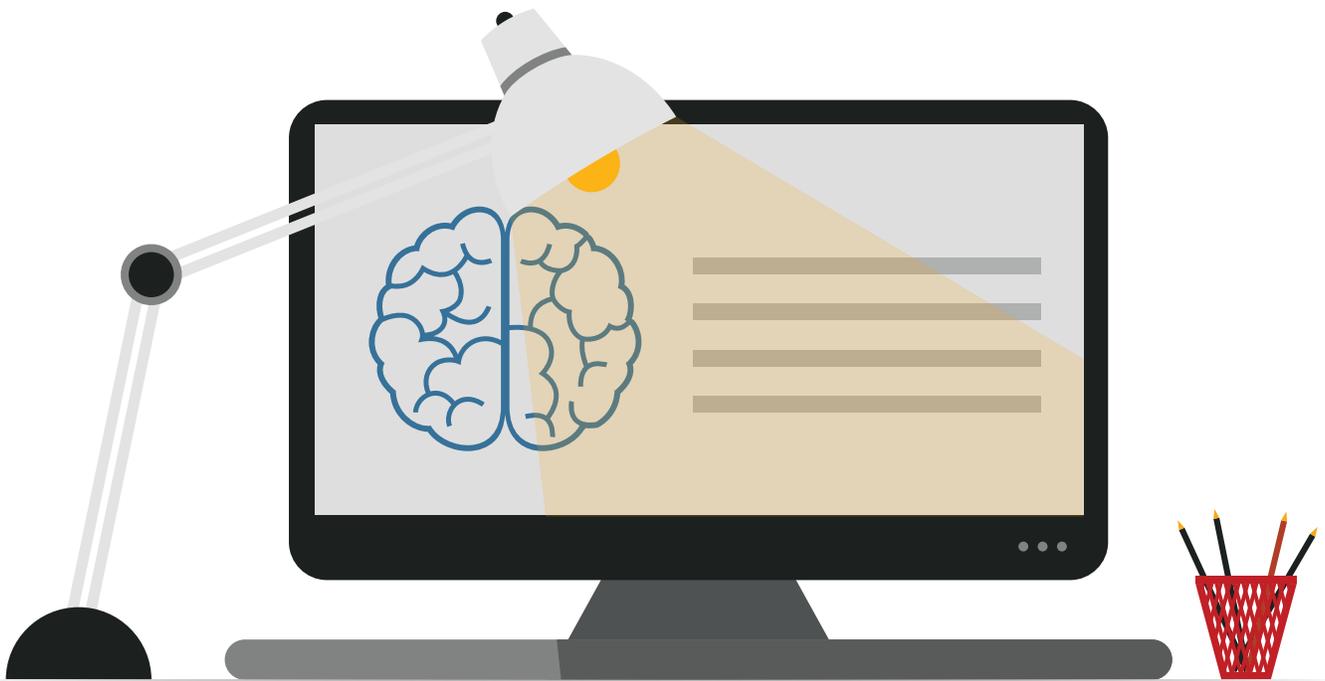
★ Are you aware of any tools or apps that have been shown to improve brain/cognitive functioning?

KIP JOHNSON: There are some tools and apps available that have been shown to improve some elements of cognitive functioning. However, there is a need for a comprehensive program using innovative strategies and technologies to alter and improve brain health and function. I am currently creating the content for such a comprehensive program.

★ What advice would you give to health promotion practitioners who are looking for ways to incorporate brain health into their wellness programs?

KIP JOHNSON: Education is a keystone to improving brain health. That education can be multidimensional, incorporating webinars, seminars, computer-based programs and written resources. Most resources focus on a specific area of brain illness or disease state or on a narrow problem, such as just improving memory. My “Keeping Your Brain Young—20 Successful Strategies to be Razor Sharp for a Lifetime” webinars and seminars are designed to identify clearly the practices or milieus that harm the brain so that they can be avoided, as well as recommend specific behaviors, environments, nutrients and supplements that can not only improve, but optimize or maximize brain function. 

“Education is a keystone to improving brain health. That education can be multidimensional, incorporating webinars, seminars, computer-based programs and written resources.”





17002 Marcy Street, Suite 140 | Omaha, NE 68118
402.827.3590 | welcoa.org

For more great resources like this,
become a WELCOA Member today.
Visit welcoa.org/joinfr

* DISCOUNT APPLIES TO NEW INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIPS

Enjoy a secret
saving by using
discount code:

JOINFR