

Can't remember where you left your glasses? Been to the supermarket and forgotten the most important thing you went for? Join the club. But it doesn't have to be like that. You can keep your brain in shape and it's never too late to start.

That's the inspiring message from Tony Buzan, creator of Mind Maps and author of a new book called *Age-proof Your Brain*.

Tony, 66, developed Mind Maps in the 1960s after he became convinced that traditional note taking did not simulate memory or creativity in the best way. Mind Maps are now used by millions of people, including Microsoft's co-founder Bill Gates and former vice-president of the USA Al Gore.

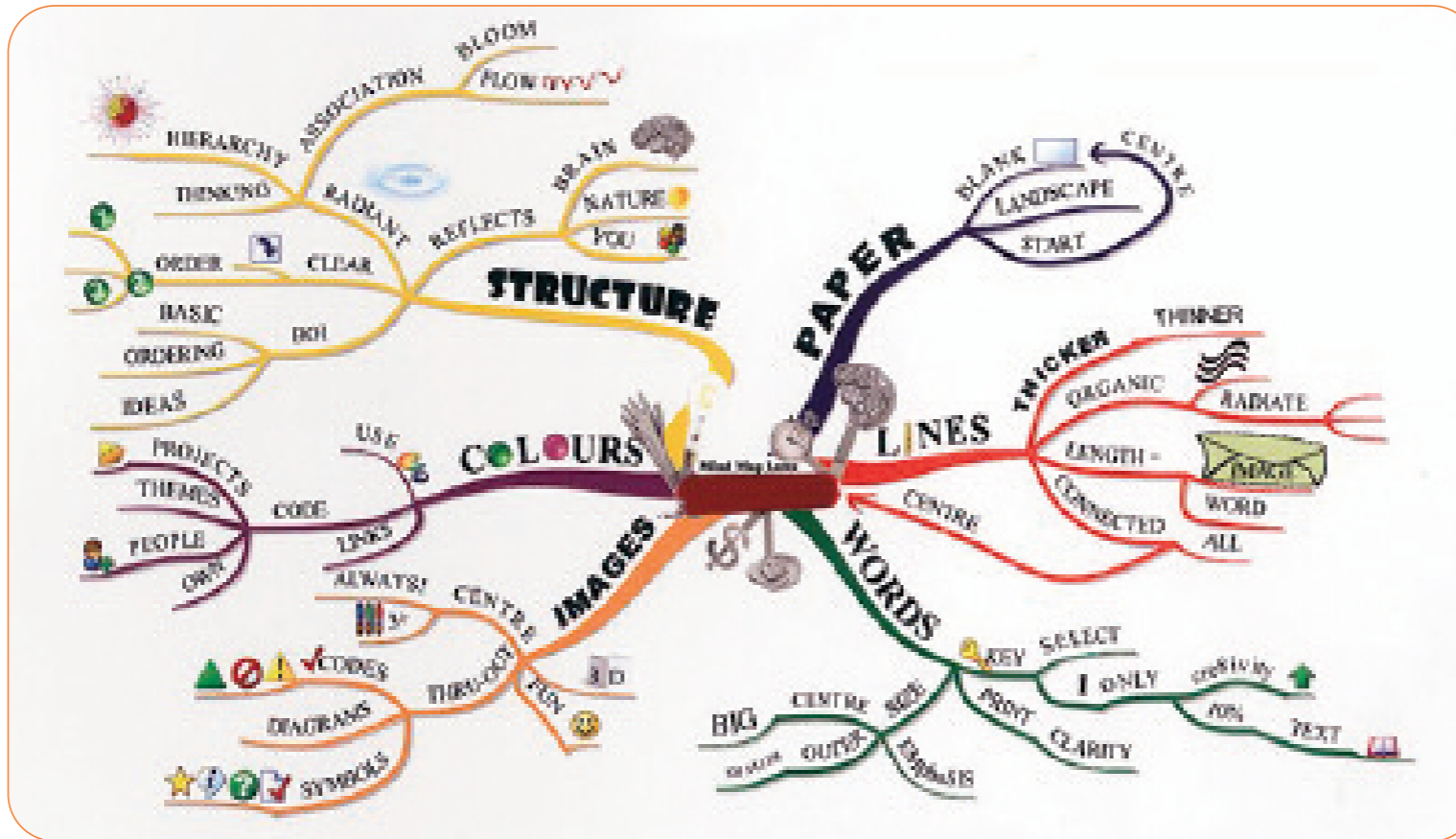
Mind Maps are designed to stimulate your creativity, improve your memory and help you to learn. They use words and images that you draw radiating out from a central image, in order to tap into several of your senses. They can be used to remember new information, as a way to brainstorm ideas or to plan a project.

For instance, a Mind Map created by me to learn and remember the nine muses of Greek myth, includes colour, thick branches and thinner ones, visual images and words all radiating out from a central image. To remember the muses, I visualise the Mind Map and can see the shape of the overall map, the colours of the branches, their position in relation to each other, the names, which I arranged alphabetically, the images associated with each muse and their 'responsibilities'.

Tony says: 'I use mind mapping in all aspects of my life, for planning my books, all the study I do, every brainstorm, throughout my business, to write my poetry, to coach Olympic athletes; for every major decision I make.'

'For really complex, large areas of work, you can use a Mind Map to plan the overall goal and then start a new Mind Map from each of the major branches and each becomes a new start.'

Tony advocates using Mind Maps along with 'brain training' exercises to ensure your



Improve your brain power

The potential of the human brain is phenomenal but we only use a tiny percentage of its might. **Christine Moss** finds out how to make more of that sleeping giant

brain stays sharp and alert, whatever your age. He says: 'It's not natural to lose your memory, ability to learn and creativity as

you get older. It's normal but it's not natural. 'We can get more creative throughout life. It's only because we use the wrong formula that we aren't. Memory and creativity should get better as we age, all we need are the right tools.

'You can age-proof your brain at any age. You can always halt the decline and move forward. You are re-forging and making new links in your brain. The more you train your brain the more it grows. It's a bit like a muscle, except that a muscle can become too big but the brain's intelligence, creativity and memory can continue to grow.'

Tony denies suggestions that our brains decline with age. Although younger people often do better than older people in IQ tests, Tony says that this is simply because younger people have more practice in the kind of mental tasks needed for IQ tests. Secondly, because they are younger it takes them less time to access the information they have. Once a time restriction is relaxed on these tests, Tony says older people do as well as younger ones.

To get the most out of your brain though, it needs that practice and that means an investment of your time. It's the old idea of 'use it or lose it'. To keep your brain in tip-top shape you need to look at everything that can affect your ability to perform well, from mental agility and memory training to physical exercise and diet.

Tony's book suggests a programme that kicks off with a seven-day 'get sharp' plan of brain exercises that take an hour a day and at the end of which he says you should be noticeably sharper and more mentally agile.

The second part of the programme requires you to set aside one day a week for seven weeks for training. At the end of this section you

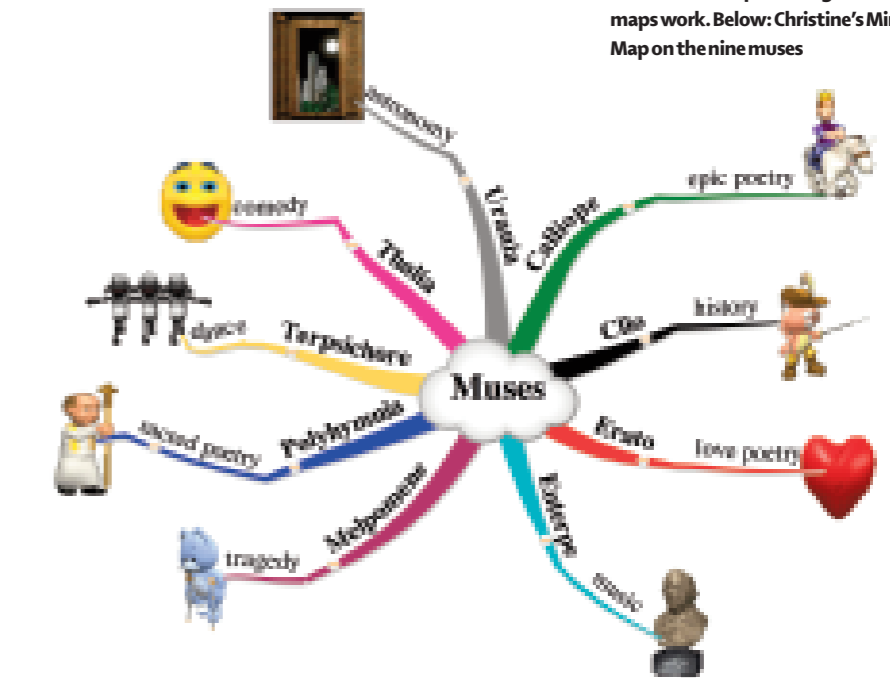
Invest in yourself tips from Tony Buzan

Tony has advice for anyone looking to get the most out of their life and increase their wellbeing.

- Realise you can progress in any area throughout your life.
- Focus on being a multi-intelligent human being.
- When you are in your 50s, 60s and 70s you are still very young in terms of your brain's ability to grow.
- All your multiple intelligences need constant nurturing and development, especially your senses and physical body. Ladies of 90 run marathons so at 60 you can be very physically active and should be.
- You need to establish and keep

- relationships with people of all ages. You need older mentors, people your own age to reminisce with and younger people of all age groups to keep you alert and in touch.
- Find new ways of contributing to society.
- Form and or join clubs to learn skills, music, travel, language etc.
- Expand your knowledge of different cultures.
- Guarantee you have friendship, affection and love in your life.
- Devote time to you on your own, but also devote time to be with others, not just one or the other.
- Have fun.

Left: A Mind Map showing how mind maps work. Below: Christine's Mind Map on the nine muses



should be feeling as mentally slick as you were 10 years ago.

The final part of the programme is maintaining and building on your progress with mind boosting plans. Tony says: 'Because

your brain is working so well for you, you should also find that you improve your quality of life overall – you should be happier, more confident, more adventurous and have renewed your lust for life.'

Improve your memory with exercises like this

Age-proof Your Brain has exercises to improve your number, visual, logic, learning and memory skills. Many of the techniques work by linking the thing to be remembered with something else.

For example, you could remember numbers by linking them to a visual shape.

0 might be a doughnut; 1 a paintbrush; 2 swan; 3 heart; 4 yacht; 5 hook; 6 elephant's trunk; 7 boomerang; 8 snowman; 9 flag; 10 bat and ball.

Say your PIN number was 4527, you would think of a yacht chased by Captain Hook pursued

by a swan with a boomerang in its beak. Once you know the yacht is 4 etc, you'll remember your PIN.

You could create a Mind Map for the numbers 0 to 10 with each of the images on its own branch and practise throughout the day with any numbers you see such as prices in shops or the date.

Or, you might prefer to think about rhyming tags, like this:

0 hero; 1 bun; 2 shoe; 3 tree; 4 door; 5 hive; 6 sticks; 7 heaven; 8 skate; 9 vine; 10 hen.

Once you have your system in your head you can use it to remember your shopping list in the right order. Try making vivid, weird connections between the items in this list and your number image.

1 bread; 2 bleach; 3 tea; 4 salt; 5 milk; 6 potatoes; 7 eggs; 8 soap; 9 bin bags; 10 detergent.

For example, for bread you might think of Leonardo da Vinci slicing a loaf with a paintbrush. Absurd as it is, you won't forget it!



Tony Buzan has written more than 90 books, with sales in more than 150 countries, and his books have been translated into at least 33 languages.

For more about Tony Buzan, visit www.buzanworld.com
Age-proof Your Brain is published by Harper Thorsons at £12.99 (ISBN: 978-0-00-723310-6)

The Mind Map Book, by Tony and his brother, Barry, who is Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, is published by BBC Active at £14.99 (ISBN: 140-6-61-2790)

How to Mind Map: the Ultimate Thinking Tool that will Change your Life, is published by Thorsons at £6.99 (ISBN: 978-0007146840).

Mind Maps are traditionally hand drawn using coloured pens and pencils but Tony Buzan has now launched software so that they can be drawn on a computer. You can download a free trial version of the **iMindMap software** at www.iMindMap.com

