

Maintaining Your Brain Health

Research suggests that certain lifestyle factors, such as one's diet, exercise, and level of social engagement may help to reduce the risk of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease. Many of these lifestyle factors can be addressed through simple changes to your daily routine. Always be wary of companies that promote expensive solutions or diets that have little evidence supporting them.

Cognitive Activity

Staying mentally active encourages blood flow to the brain and promotes new pathways and brain connections. Mentally stimulating activities may possibly maintain or even improve cognition. Some activity ideas include:

- Reading a book
- Playing strategic games
- Learning a new skill or hobby
- Taking a class to challenge your brain with new information
- Exploring ways of using your five senses

Exercise and Physical Health

Research has shown that exercise and physical activity is the #1 thing you can do to reduce your risk of cognitive decline. Increased stimulation, blood and oxygen flow to the brain has many benefits. Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise program.

- Monitor blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, and cholesterol levels
- Gradually increase the amount of activity and incorporate activities that you enjoy
- Consider activities that are mentally challenging and socially engaging, such as a dance class with friends
- Get quality sleep, stop smoking, and enjoy alcohol only in moderation
- Take good care of yourself and manage stress levels



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Diet and Nutrition

A diet low in fat and added sugar, while high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains can reduce the risk of many chronic diseases, including heart disease and Type 2 Diabetes. A diet rich in leafy greens and cruciferous vegetables (i.e. broccoli) is associated with a reduced rate of cognitive decline. Research points to the benefits of two diets in particular: the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) and the Mediterranean diet. What is good for the heart is also good for the brain. A heart-healthy diet can have benefits for your brain & overall health.

- **Eat:** Vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans and whole grains, lean meats, fish and poultry, vegetable oils
- **Avoid:** Saturated/trans fats, processed foods, solid fat, sugar and salt, deep-fried foods, unhealthy fast food

Social Engagement

Social engagement, intellectual stimulation and staying cognitively active throughout life is associated with a lower risk of Alzheimer's disease. Research shows that socialization challenges the brain, benefits overall health and may delay the onset of dementia. When people feel good about their social networks, they tend to make healthier choices.

- Find an activity or connection that gives your life a sense of meaning
- Choose social activities that have a cognitive or physical component
- Visit with family or friends
- Get involved in the community, join a group/club, or volunteer

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