

# Healthy Body, Healthy Brain

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*Like the heart, the brain needs the right balance of nutrients . . . A brain-healthy diet is most effective when combined with physical and mental activity and social interaction.*

## Make brain-healthy life choices

When people think about staying fit, they generally think from the neck down. But the health of your brain plays a critical role in almost everything you do – thinking, feeling, remembering, working, playing, and even sleeping.

You can do many things to keep your brain healthier as you age. These steps might also reduce your risk of getting Alzheimer's disease, other dementias, and even depression.

Like other parts of the body, the brain may lose some agility as you get older. It can deteriorate even more if you don't take care of it. Science is unlocking many of the mysteries of the brain. A person can do everything "right" and still not prevent deterioration of cognitive function.

Cognitive functioning includes memory, thought, language, executive function (the ability to plan and carry out tasks), judgment, attention, perception, remembered skills, and the ability to live out a purposeful life.

Two common terms associated with loss of cognitive functioning are *dementia* and *Alzheimer's disease*. Dementia is a serious loss of cognitive ability in a previously unimpaired person, beyond what might be expected from normal aging.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, a general term for loss of memory and other intellectual abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's accounts for more than half



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of all dementia cases. Currently there is no cure. As many as 5.3 million Americans are living with this progressive and fatal brain disease. It is the seventh leading cause of all deaths and the fifth leading cause of death in people over the age of 65.

### **Develop a healthy attitude**

People are never too old or too young to begin taking care of their bodies and brains. It is extremely important to be proactive when it comes to brain health. Enjoy life – humor will lift your spirits and strengthen your body.

### **Stay physically active**

Physical exercise is essential for maintaining good blood flow to the brain as well as to encourage brain cell development. It also can significantly reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, and diabetes.



### **Maintain social contacts**

Social activity not only makes physical and mental activity more enjoyable, but it also can reduce stress levels, which helps maintain healthy connections among brain cells. Keeping a network of at least five friends will stimulate the brain and the soul.

### **Stay mentally active**

Keeping the brain active seems to increase its vitality and may build its reserves of brain cells and connections. You could even generate new brain cells.

### **Limit alcohol and quit smoking**

Alcohol damages the heart, liver, muscles, and nerves and may increase injuries from falls. Limit consumption of alcohol to 1 ounce per day. Do not drink any alcohol if it has a negative interaction with medications you take. Check with your doctor and/or pharmacist.

People are never too old to stop smoking. Most communities have at least one agency with cessation programs to help you kick the habit. Health benefits are immediate.

### **Understand your medications**

Patients may be prescribed different medications by more than one physician. Avoid overlap of medications and overmedication by discussing all prescriptions with each doctor or healthcare provider you see.

Adopt a brain-healthy diet, which reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes, encourages good blood flow to the brain, and is low in fat and cholesterol. Like the heart, the brain needs the right balance of nutrients, including protein and sugar (carbohydrates), to function well.

### **Keep your soul healthy**

Persons with an active spiritual life have fewer health problems and fewer disabilities from illness. When you retire from work, stay involved in your community. Renew or start a hobby.

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2010

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