
Keeping Our Brains Healthy



Gaps still exist in our understanding of how the brain works and how to keep it healthy. Unfortunately, there is no magic pill for brain health and keeping our brains working well is a mix of genetics, lifestyle choices, and other factors yet unknown. We would all like a no-fail plan to avoid Alzheimer's and other neurocognitive disorders, but no guarantees exist. However, there is fairly persuasive evidence for the following brain health checklist, and it is worth it to incorporate these in the effort to keep your brain as healthy as possible.

Brain Health Checklist

Do:

- Exercise - There is strong evidence to support this defense against dementia. Regular and even minor activity can lower risk. Research is still not definitive on what intensity, duration or frequency provides the most protection, but it is safe to say any and all forms of exercise are good for your brain.
- Stay Social/Network/Volunteer - We are social beings so it isn't surprising that interacting with others helps reduce our dementia risk.
- Mental Stimulation - A large body of research has demonstrated a link between lower levels of education/mental stimulation and an increase in dementia. Stimulating our brains by doing something that is different, learning a new hobby or skill, or talking to someone that has a different point of view will help our brains think differently and create new neural pathways.
- Eat Well - There is current interest in 'Mediterranean-like Diets' and its impact on brain health. These diets are high in fresh vegetables with a mix of unsaturated fats such as olive oil and fish as well as lowering red meat consumption. Coffee and tea have also shown positive effects. More research is needed, but it is fairly safe to say increasing our intake of fresh vegetables and lowering saturated fats is probably a good step towards better brain health.
- Prevent, Diagnose, and Treat - There are some chronic conditions that can contribute to dementia risk and worth treating sooner than later: hypertension, diabetes, obesity, hearing loss, and depression. Talking to our doctors and following through with recommendations is critical to preventing future brain health issues.

Don't:

- Don't Smoke - People who smoke, even at the lowest level, have an increased risk of developing dementia.
- Don't Over-Drink or Take Recreational Drugs - Mild alcohol use could be a protection against dementia, but more research is needed. Excessive drinking or drug use, however, is linked to an increase in alcohol and drug-related dementia.