

Brain Health is Important

There is no magic pill – at least not yet – that can prevent memory loss or keep us young and healthy forever, but we can help to maintain our brain health by effectively managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, high cholesterol, and hypertension, reducing stress, having a positive attitude, engaging in social activities, being more physically active and challenging ourselves mentally.

Exercise Daily



If we were to make just one suggestion for supporting mental health and memory it would be, “Exercise!”

Exercise helps the body release hormones that make us feel great

and aid in providing a nourishing environment for the growth of brain cells. We know that physical exercise is crucial for maintaining good blood flow to the brain, reducing the risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes, but it also helps protect against the risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.

Recent research from UCLA demonstrated that exercise increased growth factors in the brain making it easier for the brain to grow new neuronal connections. According to a study done by the Department of Exercise Science at the University of Georgia, even briefly exercising for 20 minutes facilitates information processing and memory functions. In addition, a study conducted at the Center for Brain Health at The University of Texas at Dallas found that engaging in a physical exercise program helps healthy aging adults improve their memory, brain health and physical fitness.

Another study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine Regular found that aerobic exercise seems to boost the size of the hippocampus, which is involved in verbal memory and learning. **So, the bottom line is – Exercise 30 minutes every day. It delivers oxygen to the brain and improves function in multiple areas.** When exercising, make sure to protect your head and wear a helmet for activities such as biking and skiing.

Exercising isn’t your thing?

Well, you’re in luck, there are many activities that keep those mental juices flowing.

Here are some tips to help you stay mentally fit.

- **Exercise Daily.**
Physical exercise is crucial for maintaining good blood flow to the brain.
- **Eat Healthy Foods.**
Research suggests that nutrition influences the development and progression of dementia.
- **Sleep Well.**
A good night’s sleep is essential for forming and consolidating memories.
- **Stay Engaged.**
Social engagement and activities play a role in maintaining cognitive function.
- **Monitor Blood Pressure.**
Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to stroke by damaging and weakening your brain’s blood vessels.
- **Keep Your Balance.**
Falls can result in head injury, which can cause difficulty with thinking and memory.

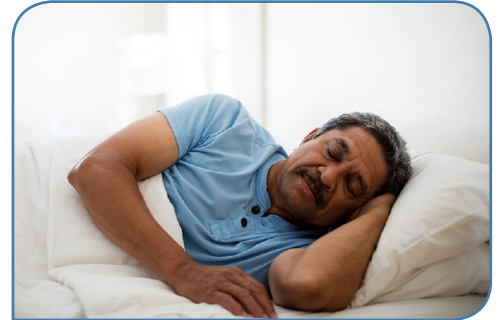
Eat Healthy Foods

There is research that suggests that nutritional intake influences the development and progression of dementia. Eating well helps your entire body as foods that are good for the heart, are also good for the brain. The best current evidence recommends a heart-healthy Mediterranean diet, which includes relatively little red meat and emphasizes whole grains, fruits and vegetables, fish and shellfish, and nuts, olive oil and other healthy fats.



Sleep Well

A good night's sleep is essential for forming and consolidating memories. It plays a central role in the formation of new neuronal connections and the pruning of old ones. Studies show that getting enough sleep improves reaction time and split-second decision making. A study of cognitively healthy people aged 65 and over showed that daytime napping is associated with a lower risk of cognitive decline at two-year and ten-year follow-ups. On the other hand, getting less than six-and-a-half hours of sleep a night are associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline at ten-year follow-up.



In order to help you fall asleep and stay asleep for the night, The National Sleep Foundation recommends sticking to a sleep schedule of the same bedtime and wake up time, even on the weekends. Many people find it helpful to have a relaxing bedtime routine such as such a taking a warm bath, staying away from computer and TV screens at least an hour before bed, or reading for 30 minutes prior to going to sleep. Bedrooms should be a comfortable, but cool temperature, free from any noise or light that can disturb your sleep. Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable and supportive.

Stay Engaged

Staying engaged by maintaining friendships, doing things with others, and challenging ourselves help to maintain mental fitness.

Findings from a few studies suggest that social engagement and enjoyable hobbies and leisure activities play a role in maintaining cognitive function and in delaying or preventing dementia. Studies have also shown that people with more social ties live longer, have better health, and are less depressed. Close relationships and large social networks have a positive impact on memory and cognitive function as people age. Social networks may also facilitate healthy behaviors, such as exercise.



In addition, learning a challenging new activity can strengthen the connections between parts of your brain. In a recent study, Dr. Denise Park, a neuroscientist at the University of Texas at Dallas, randomly assigned 200 older adults to spend 15 hours a week for three months learning either quilting or digital photography. Compared to the group that watched movies or reminisced about past vacations and a group that worked quietly at home listening to the radio or playing easy games and puzzles, the groups challenged to learn new skills experienced significant gains in memory. One year later, they had retained their improved memory function.

Monitor your blood pressure

High blood pressure in midlife can have serious health consequences later in life. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to stroke by damaging and weakening your brain's blood vessels, causing them to narrow, rupture or leak. High blood pressure can also cause blood clots to form in the arteries leading to your brain, blocking blood flow and potentially causing a stroke or dementia. Keeping a healthy weight, exercising regularly, eating well, getting a good night's sleep, drinking less alcohol and not smoking can help control reduce the risk of high blood pressure.

Keep your balance

Falls can result in head injury, which can cause difficulty with thinking and memory. Falling is not a normal part of aging, so it's important to speak with your doctor if you are having falls. Once you fall, your chances of falling again doubles. Medication such as sedatives, antidepressants and even some over-the-counter medicines can affect your balance. You can reduce your chances of falling by doing balance and strength exercises.

Try this!

- Learn how to play a new game
- Teach a friend your favorite card game
- Volunteer to read to children
- Build a complicated model
- Assemble a complicate puzzle
- Plan a trip with friends
- Tutor a child
- Join a book group
- Learn how to play a musical instrument
- Take up a new hobby
- Usher at a local community theater

Maintaining a positive attitude helps sustain cognitive health.

- **Set personal goals.**
Goals don't have to be ambitious, but reaching them builds morale and a sense of satisfaction.
- **Keep a journal.**
Expressing yourself after a stressful day can help you gain perspective and release tension.
- **Share funnies.**
Life is too serious, so when you hear or see something funny, share it with someone you know.
- **Accept yourself.**
Seek out and embrace the positive traits of yourself and your life.
- **Express gratitude.**
People who are appreciative cope with stress better and have more positive emotions.
- **Meditate or visualize.**
Simply imagine yourself in a calm, soothing place. Try this for just 10 minutes each day.



Ohio
Council for
Cognitive
Health

Helping Ohioans living with dementia,
along with their loved ones, care partners
and broader community, live with
meaning, purpose and joy.

