

Brain Health as You Age:



What You Should Know

You Can Make a Difference! We can't control some risk factors for Alzheimer's disease such as age and genetics, but scientists are studying a number of other factors that could make a difference. Research suggests that certain lifestyle factors, such as diet, exercise, social engagement, and mentally stimulating pursuits, might help to reduce the risk of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease.

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.

- ✓ Read books, play strategic games, learn new skills or hobbies
- ✓ Keep learning; take classes and challenge your brain with new information

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 impairment. The 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
- ✓ Gradually increase your level of activity and incorporate activities you enjoy
- ✓ Consider activities that are mentally challenging and socially engaging, such as a dance class with your friends
- ✓ Get enough sleep, stop smoking, enjoy alcohol in moderation
- ✓ Take good care of yourself and manage stress levels

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 good for the brain. A heart-healthy diet can have benefits for your brain and 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 foods
- ✓ Consult with your doctor about dietary supplements and vitamins

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 or make new friends
- ✓ Get involved in the community, join a group or club, or volunteer

You can make a difference!

Don't wait, start today!

Research evidence from National Institutes of Health (www.nia.nih.gov)

