

## 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.

## Here are some tips to help you stay mentally fit.

**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 demonstrated that exercise increased growth factors in the brain making it easier for the brain to grow new neuronal connections. Even briefly exercising for 20 minutes facilitates information processing and memory functions.

Regular aerobic exercise seems to boost the size of the hippocampus, which is involved in verbal memory and learning.

**Bottom line: 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.

### Maintaining a positive attitude helps sustain cognitive health.

#### Try this!

- **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.

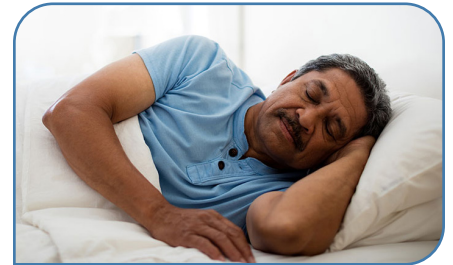
## Eat Well

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.



## A good night's sleep is essential for forming and consolidating memories.

Sleep 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, and that daytime napping is associated with a lower risk of cognitive decline. Getting less than six-and-a-half hours of sleep a night is associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline.



In order to help you fall asleep and stay asleep for the night, stick 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 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. Maintaining friendships, doing things with others, and challenging ourselves helps to maintain mental fitness.

Social engagement, enjoyable hobbies, and leisure activities play a role in maintaining cognitive function and in delaying or reducing the risk of dementia. 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.



## Learn a challenging new activity. This can strengthen connections between parts of the brain.

### 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 complicated 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