



Behaviors & Practices to Encourage Healthy Brain Aging

Currently, there is no way to prevent Alzheimer's disease, but evidence suggests that lifestyle strategies that support healthy aging can be beneficial for the brain as well. Take steps to boost your brain health by incorporating these wellness tips into your daily routine.

- **Maintain a healthy weight and exercise.** Preliminary research shows that what's good for the heart is also good for the brain. Studies indicate that exercising may impact age and disease-related brain changes.
- **Get 7-8 hours of sleep per night.** Deep sleep is the only time the brain does not make the amyloid that creates the plaques that lead to Alzheimer's disease. During this deep sleep, also called "slow wave sleep," the brain also cleans itself out. Seven to 8 hours of sleep per night, even interrupted, allows the brain to cycle in and out of deep sleep long enough to clean itself.
- **Follow a healthy diet, avoiding tobacco and excess alcohol.** Eating a heart-healthy diet benefits both your body and your brain. In general, this is a diet that is lower in saturated fats. Research in the area of the relationship between diet and cognitive functioning is somewhat limited, but it does point to the benefits of two diets in particular: the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet and the Mediterranean diet. These diets can help reduce heart disease and may also be able to reduce risk of dementia.
- **Challenge the mind and stay socially connected.** Staying socially and intellectually active is key to brain function. Each time a person learns something, new connections are made between nerve cells in the brain called synapses and existing synapses are strengthened. Building up synaptic reserve is an important part in preserving brain health because Alzheimer's disease directly correlates to the loss of synapses.
- **Manage and reduce stress.** In new studies, researchers are learning more and more about the role stress plays on the body. Stress is related to inflammation in the body and can produce chemicals in the brain that are toxic to nerve cells. New studies indicate that even a simple daily meditation practice and other stress relieving activities can be very beneficial.

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