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NEW RESEARCH SUMMARY: LIFESTYLE CHANGES HELP REDUCE RISK OF COGNITIVE DECLINE

*The Alzheimer's Association unveils "10 Ways to Love Your Brain" in recognition of
Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month*

CHICAGO, June 1, 2015 – The evidence is mounting: People can reduce their risk of cognitive decline by making key lifestyle changes. That is the conclusion of a new research summary published online today in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association*.

"The research on cognitive decline is still evolving," said Angela Geiger, Chief Strategy Officer, Alzheimer's Association. "But there are actions people can take. Certain healthy behaviors known to combat cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes may also reduce the risk of cognitive decline. These include staying mentally active, engaging in regular physical activity and eating a heart-healthy diet that benefits your body and your brain. There is also some evidence people may benefit from staying socially engaged with friends, family and the community."

With this in mind, the Alzheimer's Association offers *10 Ways to Love Your Brain*, tips that may reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

1. **Break a sweat.** Engage in regular cardiovascular exercise that elevates your heart rate and increases blood flow to the brain and body. Several studies have found an association between physical activity and reduced risk of cognitive decline.
2. **Hit the books.** Formal education in any stage of life will help reduce your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. For example, take a class at a local college, community center or online.
3. **Butt out.** Evidence shows that smoking increases risk of cognitive decline. Quitting smoking can reduce that risk to levels comparable to those who have not smoked.
4. **Follow your heart.** Evidence shows that risk factors for cardiovascular disease and stroke – obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes – negatively impact your cognitive health. Take care of your heart, and your brain just might follow.
5. **Heads up!** Brain injury can raise your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Wear a seat belt, use a helmet when playing contact sports or riding a bike, and take steps to prevent falls.
6. **Fuel up right.** Eat a healthy and balanced diet that is lower in fat and higher in vegetables and fruit to help reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Although research on diet and cognitive function is limited, certain diets, including [Mediterranean](#) and [Mediterranean-DASH](#) (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), may contribute to risk reduction.
7. **Catch some Zzz's.** Not getting enough sleep due to conditions like insomnia or sleep apnea may result in problems with memory and thinking.
8. **Take care of your mental health.** Some studies link a history of depression with increased risk of cognitive decline, so seek medical treatment if you have symptoms of depression, anxiety or other mental health concerns. Also, try to manage stress.

9. **Buddy up.** Staying socially engaged may support brain health. Pursue social activities that are meaningful to you. Find ways to be part of your local community – if you love animals, consider volunteering at a local shelter. If you enjoy singing, join a local choir or help at an afterschool program. Or, just share activities with friends and family.
10. **Stump yourself.** Challenge and activate your mind. Build a piece of furniture. Complete a jigsaw puzzle. Do something artistic. Play games, such as bridge, that make you think strategically. Challenging your mind may have short and long-term benefits for your brain.

“While the adoption of all of these habits is important in influencing brain health, if it seems overwhelming, start with one or two changes and build on them,” said Geiger. “While some changes may be challenging, others can be fun. Try to choose activities and foods you enjoy.”

In addition to reducing your risk of cognitive decline, these tips may also reduce your risk of dementia. Evidence for reducing risk of dementia is currently strongest in relation to formal education and the avoidance of head injury; other tips show indication of possibly reducing risk. Alzheimer’s disease, the most common form of dementia, is one of the nation’s largest public health crises. Alzheimer’s is an irreversible neurological disease that impairs cognition, orientation and functional capacity, and it is the only cause of death among the top 10 life-threatening conditions in the United States that cannot be prevented, cured or even slowed.

Cognitive decline is a deterioration in memory or cognition. Although some cognitive decline is expected with age, it is not yet known how this may directly relate to dementia.

Given the growing evidence that people can reduce their risk of cognitive decline, and in recognition of Alzheimer’s & Brain Awareness Month this June, the Alzheimer’s Association is launching a new brain health education program, *Healthy Habits for a Healthier You*, available through local chapters.

In addition to recommending these healthy habits, the Alzheimer’s Association is asking the community to come together and help fight Alzheimer’s disease during Alzheimer’s & Brain Awareness Month by doing the following:

- Take the Purple Pledge at alz.org.
- Join the Alzheimer’s Association in wearing purple on June 21, and share photos of yourself, family, friends and co-workers wearing purple via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. with the hashtags #ENDALZ and #GoPurple.
- Participate in The Longest Day[®], a sunrise-to-sunset event to honor those facing Alzheimer’s disease with strength, passion and endurance. Visit alz.org today to start a team to raise funds and awareness.

About the Alzheimer’s Association

The Alzheimer’s Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer’s care, support and research. It is the largest nonprofit funder of Alzheimer’s research. The Association’s mission is to eliminate Alzheimer’s disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. Its vision is a world without Alzheimer’s. Visit alz.org or call 800.272.3900.

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