

alzheimer's  association™  
Midlands Chapter



## MAINTAIN YOUR BRAIN®

*There is growing evidence that lifestyle can affect your brain health and risk for dementia.*



## 10 WAYS TO MAINTAIN YOUR BRAIN®

1. **Head First** Good health starts with your brain, so don't take it for granted. It's one of the most important body organs, and it needs care and maintenance.
2. **Take Brain Health to Heart** Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke can increase your risk of Alzheimer's.
3. **Your Numbers Count** Keep your body weight, blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels within recommended ranges.
4. **Feed your Brain** Eat a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet that features dark-skinned vegetables and fruits; foods rich in antioxidants; vitamins E, C and B-12; folate; and omega-3 fatty acids.
5. **Work your Body** Physical exercise keeps the blood flowing and encourages new brain cells. It doesn't have to be a strenuous activity. Do what you can – walking 30 minutes a day – to keep both body and mind active.
6. **Jog your Mind** Keeping your brain active and engaged increases its vitality and builds reserves of brain cells and connections. Read, write, play games, do crossword puzzles.
7. **Connect with Others** Leisure activities that combine physical, mental and social elements are most likely to prevent dementia. Be social, converse, volunteer, join.
8. **Heads up! Protect your Brain** Take precautions against injuries. Use your car seat belts; unclutter your house to avoid falls; and wear a helmet when cycling.
9. **Use your Head** Avoid unhealthy habits. Don't smoke, drink excessive alcohol or use street drugs.
10. **Think Ahead – Start Today!** You can do something today to protect your tomorrow.



When people think about staying fit, they generally think from the neck down. But the health of your brain plays a critical role in almost everything you do: thinking, feeling, remembering, working and playing – even sleeping. The good news is that we now know there's a lot you can do to help keep your brain healthier as you age. These steps might also reduce your risk of Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.

Like other parts of your body, your brain may lose some agility as you get older. It can deteriorate even more if you don't take care of it. Science is unlocking many of the mysteries of the brain, but we don't have all the answers yet. You can do everything "right" and still not prevent Alzheimer's disease. What's offered here is the best and most up-to-date information available so that you can make your own decisions about your health. This brochure will give adults advice on how to Maintain Your Brain®.

### **Disease and Risk Factors You Can't Control**

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia – brain disorders that affect your ability to function effectively in daily living. Well-established risk factors for Alzheimer's disease are genetics and aging; 10 percent of those over age 65 and 50 percent of those over 85 have Alzheimer's. Unfortunately, aging and genetics are two risk factors you can't control.

It's not known what causes Alzheimer's disease or what the role of genetics is in most cases of Alzheimer's, though having parents or siblings with the disease increases your risk. A small percentage of cases is known to be caused by inherited mutated genes. In other cases, variants of specific genes increase risk, but people who inherit such variants from both parents still may not get the disease. These risk factors that you cannot change will set a starting point for you, but there is hope that adopting the Maintain Your Brain® life habits might delay or prevent the appearance of Alzheimer's disease.

### **Lifestyle and Risk Factors You Can Control**

There is growing evidence that lifestyle can affect your brain health and even your risk for dementia. There are things you can do to reduce your risk and take care of your brain as well as your body.

Manage your overall health. Heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke affect blood flow to the brain and are risk factors for dementia. Recent research indicates that diabetes may increase the risk of Alzheimer's, possibly because of increased risk of heart disease and impaired insulin function. Avoiding or managing these health conditions is one way to take care of your brain.

### **Make Brain-Healthy Lifestyle Choices**

- ✓ **Manage your numbers** – Controlling your body weight, blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar helps reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. Remember, what's good for the heart is good for the brain.
- ✓ **Eat wisely** – Research suggests that high cholesterol may contribute to stroke and brain cell damage. A low-fat, low-cholesterol diet is advisable. And there is growing evidence that a diet rich in dark vegetables and fruits, which contain antioxidants, may help protect brain cells.
- ✓ **Stay physically and mentally active** – Physical exercise helps maintain good blood flow to the brain, which is essential for brain health, and also alters chemicals that help protect the brain. Mentally stimulating activities strengthen brain cells and the connections between them and may even create new nerve cells.
- ✓ **Remain socially involved** – Social activity not only makes physical and mental activity more enjoyable, it can reduce stress levels which helps maintain healthy connections among brain cells.



## **DIET**

### **Adopt a Brain-Healthy Diet**

According to the most current research, a brain healthy diet is one that reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes, encourages good blood flow to the brain and is low in fat and cholesterol. Like the heart, the brain needs the right balance of nutrients, including protein and sugar, to function well. A brain healthy diet is most effective when combined with physical and mental activity and social interaction.

Manage your body weight for overall good health of brain and body. A long-term study of 1,500 adults found that those who were obese in middle age were twice as likely to develop dementia in later life. Those who also had high cholesterol and high blood pressure had six times the risk of dementia. Adopt an overall food lifestyle, rather than a short-term diet, and eat in moderation.

### **Reduce your Intake of Foods High in Fat and Cholesterol**

Studies have shown that high intake of saturated fat and cholesterol clogs the arteries and is associated with higher risk for Alzheimer's disease. However, HDL (or "good") cholesterol may help protect brain cells. Use mono- and polyunsaturated fats, such as olive oil. Try baking or grilling food instead of frying.

### **Increase your Intake of Protective Foods**

Current research suggests that certain foods may reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke and appear to protect brain cells.

In general, dark-skinned fruits and vegetables have the highest levels of naturally occurring antioxidant levels. Such vegetables include: kale, spinach, Brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, broccoli, beets, red bell pepper, onion, corn and eggplant. Fruits with high antioxidant levels include prunes, raisins, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, plums, oranges, red grapes and cherries.

Cold water fish contain beneficial omega-3 fatty acids: halibut, mackerel, salmon, trout and tuna.

Some nuts can be a useful part of your diet; almonds, pecans and walnuts are a good source of vitamin E, an antioxidant.

Not enough information is available to indicate what quantities of these foods might be most beneficial for brain health. For example, it is not clear how much fruit would have to be consumed to have a detectable benefit. However, a study of elderly women showed that those who ate the most green, leafy and cruciferous vegetables in the group were one to two years younger in mental function than women who ate few of these vegetables.

### **Vitamin Supplements May be Helpful**

There is some indication that vitamins, such as vitamin E, or vitamins E and C together and vitamin B-12 and foliate may be important in lowering your risk of developing Alzheimer's. A brain healthy diet will help increase your intake of these vitamins and the trace elements necessary for the body to use them effectively.



## **EXERCISE**

### **Physical Exercise “pumps up” your brain, too**

Physical exercise is essential for maintaining good blood flow to the brain as well as to encourage new brain cells. It also can significantly reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes, and thereby protect against those risk factors for Alzheimer’s and other dementias.

Growing evidence shows that physical exercise does not have to be strenuous or even require a major time commitment. It is most effective when done regularly, and in combination with a brain healthy diet, mental activity and social interaction.

Aerobic exercise improves oxygen consumption which benefits brain function; aerobic fitness has been found to reduce brain cell loss in elderly subjects. Activities like walking; bicycling, gardening, tai chi and yoga for about 30 minutes daily get the body moving and the heart pumping.

Physical activities that also involve mental activity – plotting your driving route, observing traffic signals, making choices – provide additional value for brain health. And doing these activities with a companion offers the added benefit of social interaction.

### **Avoid Head Trauma**

Severe head injuries have been associated with increased risk for later development of Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias. Use protective headgear when engaged in physical activities, such as bicycling, horseback riding, bouldering, skating and so on. Wear a seat belt. Guard against falls by using handrails, watching out for tripping hazards and taking other precautions.

### **Don’t Smoke**

Smoking interferes with blood flow and oxygen to the brain and is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

## **MENTAL ACTIVITY**

Mental activity helps you stay sharp. Mental decline as you age appears to be largely related to altered connections among brain cells. But research has found that keeping the brain active seems to increase its vitality and may build its reserves of brain cells and connections. You could even generate new brain cells.

Low levels of education have been found to be related to a higher risk of Alzheimer’s later in life. This may be due to a lower level of lifelong mental stimulation. Put another way, higher levels of education appear to be somewhat protective against Alzheimer’s, possibly because brain cells and their connections are stronger. Well-educated individuals can still get Alzheimer’s, but symptoms may appear later because of this protective effect.

You don’t have to turn your life upside down or make extreme changes to achieve many of these benefits. Start with something small like a daily walk. After a while, add another small change.

Keep your brain active every day:

- ✓ Stay curious and involved – commit to lifelong learning.
- ✓ Read, write, and work crossword or other puzzles.
- ✓ Attend lectures and plays.
- ✓ Enroll in courses at your local adult education center, community college or other community group.
- ✓ Play games.
- ✓ Garden.
- ✓ Try memory exercises.

## **SOCIAL ACTIVITY**

### **Social Activity is Good for Your Brain**

Research shows that people who are regularly engaged in social interaction maintain their brain vitality. But again, the combination of physical and mental activity with social engagement – and a brain healthy diet – is more effective than any of these factors alone.

A recent study reported that leisure activities that combine physical, mental and social activity are the most likely to prevent dementia. In the study of 800 men and women aged 75 and older, those who were more physically active, more mentally active or more socially engaged had a lower risk of developing dementia. And those who combined these activities did even better.

Other research found that sports, cultural activities, emotional support and close personal relationships together appear to have a protective effect against dementia.

So stay socially engaged in activities that stimulate the mind and body:

- ✓ Stay active in the workplace.
- ✓ Volunteer in community groups and causes.
- ✓ Join bridge clubs, square dancing clubs, or other social groups.
- ✓ Travel.

## **JOIN US**

Alzheimer's disease was first identified by Dr. Alois Alzheimer in 1906, but 95 percent of what we know has been discovered in the last 15 years. Now, for the first time, you can manage your lifestyle to help reduce your risk of Alzheimer's. And we can anticipate breakthroughs toward prevention in the next decade.

Today 5.3 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease; unless something is done to prevent it, that number will increase by 70 percent to 7.7 million Americans by 2030. Simple lifestyle modifications, if adopted by everyone, would have an enormous impact on our nation's public health and the cost of health care.

The Alzheimer's Association<sup>®</sup> is the world leader in research and support. As scientific discovery progresses, we will continue to provide you with the information you need.

If you are a baby boomer (born between 1946 and 1964), you are one of 77 million Americans, the largest population group in the United States. At the current pace of discovery, you can be the first generation to face a future without Alzheimer's disease.

That future will only come about with your help. Join the Alzheimer's Association<sup>®</sup> Maintain Your Brain<sup>®</sup> campaign:

- ✓ Learn more about Alzheimer's disease and our progress in research.
- ✓ Adopt a brain-healthy lifestyle.
- ✓ Get involved in our efforts to prevent Alzheimer's.
- ✓ Advocate for increased federal funds for research.
- ✓ Donate to the Alzheimer's Association<sup>®</sup>.

***Alzheimer's Association<sup>®</sup> Maintain Your Brain<sup>®</sup> does not guarantee individual health outcomes.***

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**Midlands Chapter**

**24/7 Helpline: 800.272.3900**

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