

Monthly newsletter for people caring for those affected by Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia.

alzheimer's association®

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Healthy Living for Brain Health in 2022

By Gabriella Garcia, PsyD

Although it seems as if we have already been in 2022 for far too long, the year has only just begun. It's not too late to take charge of your health for both your brain and body. Who said resolutions have to begin on January 1st anyway?

I've spoken to many people who ask what they can do to lower their risk for cognitive decline, especially if a family member has had dementia. For centuries, we've known that the health of the brain and the body are connected. But now, science is able to provide insights into how to make lifestyle choices that may help you keep your brain and body healthy as you age.

Although there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's and research is still evolving, evidence is strong that people can reduce their risk of cognitive decline by making key lifestyle changes, including participating in regular physical activity, staying socially engaged, getting a healthy amount of sleep and maintaining good heart health.

Heart & Head Connection. Several conditions known to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease - such as high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol - also increase the risk of developing Alzheimer's. Some autopsy studies show that as many as 80% of individuals with Alzheimer's disease also have cardiovascular disease. A prime example as to why it is never too late to put on those sneakers and get your heart pumping!



Diet & Exercise. Regular physical exercise may be a beneficial strategy to lower the risk of Alzheimer's and vascular dementia. Exercise may directly benefit brain cells by increasing blood and oxygen flow in the brain. Current evidence suggests that heart-healthy eating may also help protect the brain. Heart-healthy eating includes limiting the intake of sugar and saturated fats and making sure to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

No one diet is best, however two diets that have been studied and may be beneficial to lowering the risk of Alzheimer's are the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet and the Mediterranean diet.

- The DASH diet emphasizes vegetables, fruits, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, whole grains, fish, poultry, beans, seeds, nuts and vegetable oils. The DASH diet limits sodium, sweets, sugary beverages and red meats.

- A Mediterranean diet includes relatively little red meat. It emphasizes whole grains, fruits and vegetables, fish and shellfish, and healthy fats like nuts and olive oil.

Stay Social. A number of studies indicate that maintaining strong social connections and keeping mentally active as we age might lower the risk of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's. Experts are not certain about the reason for this association. It may be due to direct mechanisms through which social and mental stimulation strengthen connections between nerve cells in the brain. This has been exceptionally hard to do in a pandemic - especially indoors - so, grab a friend and get some fresh air (while staying 6 feet apart, of course!).

If you're caring for someone with dementia, we recommend that you join one of our support groups to find new friends who understand the challenges of caring for a person living with dementia.

Schedule your Wellness Visit. Time can pass by so quickly. Next thing you know, a year has gone by since your last wellness visit. Preventive health services play a vital role in keeping people healthy. Not only to prevent disease, but detect any possible concerns early, says Bayhealth Primary Care Physician Preeti Gupta, MD. Consider

this a friendly reminder to schedule that appointment to make sure everything is in a healthy range!

Sleep. Sleep isn't just good for your memory; it can actually lower your risk for dementia and death, according to Dr. Andrew Budson, Chief of Cognitive & Behavioral Neurology at the Veterans Affairs Boston Healthcare System, lecturer in neurology at Harvard Medical School, and chair of the Science of Learning Innovation Group at the Harvard Medical School Academy.

Dr. Budson also states that "inadequate sleep in midlife raises one's risk of dementia. There are many reasons for poor sleep in middle age: shift work, insomnia, caretaking responsibilities, anxiety, and pressing deadlines, just to name a few. Although not all of these are controllable, some are. For example, if you're currently only sleeping four to five hours because you're up late working every night, you might want to change your habits, otherwise you risk developing dementia by the time you retire!"

You Can Do It! Creating a plan can help you stick to changes to your lifestyle. Make it a group effort by including family and friends to keep each other motivated and accountable. A healthier you is right around the corner!



TIPS

TEN WAYS TO LOVE YOUR BRAIN



Break a sweat

Regularly engage in cardio exercise that elevates your heart rate and increases blood flow to your brain & body.



Hit the books

Take a class at a local college or community center to reduce your risk of cognitive decline.



Butt out

Smoking increases your risk of cognitive decline. Quitting can reduce your risk comparable to those who have not smoked.



Follow your heart

Risk factors for cardiovascular disease, like obesity, HBP and diabetes, can impact your cognitive health, too.



Catch some zzz's

Not getting enough sleep can negatively affect your cognition.



Heads up!

Brain injury can raise your risk. Wear a seatbelt, use a helmet, and take steps to prevent falls.



Take care

Manage stress and seek help for chronic conditions like depression and anxiety.



Stump yourself

Challenging your mind through hobbies, games and art can have short- and long-term benefits for your brain.



Buddy up

Sharing activities that are meaningful to you can help maintain your brain health and reduce your risk for dementia.

Find more information and ideas for activities at alz.org

CAREGIVER RETREAT
JOIN US FOR A DAY OF REST.

SATURDAY MARCH 12, 2022
10AM - 1PM
ST. JAMES CHURCH, PASO ROBLES

NO COST

RSVP BY MARCH 4
TO MARA WHITTEN
AT 805-239-5679
OR MWHITTEN@CAPSLO.ORG

CAPSLO **alzheimer's association**
Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo California Central Coast Chapter

THE LONGEST DAY
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Sign up today to fundraise your way.
The day with the most light is the day we fight the darkness of Alzheimer's.

Contact Stephanie Foster
at smfoster@alz.org
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for more information.

alz.org/tld