

GOOD FOR THE BRAIN, GOOD FOR THE BODY

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Why It Matters:

- Alzheimer's disease carries with it immense physical, emotional and financial burdens.
- There's a link between diet, exercise, social engagement, and brain health.
- Keeping your brain active and healthy may fend off dementia in later years.

It's relatively easy to understand how maintaining your physical health pays dividends at all stages of life. After all, physical fitness lets you do what you want to do — whether that means scaling mountain peaks, walking 18 holes, or simply keeping up with your kids (and their kids).

But there's reason to believe that proper maintenance of the brain is just as important to your overall health. What's more, tending to your mental fitness might be a key component in the fight against Alzheimer's disease.

You're likely aware of the physical and emotional costs associated with Alzheimer's — both for those afflicted and their loved ones. The financial burdens of this debilitating disease are equally concerning. According to the Alzheimer's Association, on average Medicare beneficiaries age 65 and older with Alzheimer's or other dementias paid \$10,315 out of pocket annually for health care and long-term care services not covered by other sources.

"Few individuals with Alzheimer's or other dementias have sufficient long-term care insurance or can afford to pay out of pocket for long-term care services for as long as the services are needed," the report notes.

Understandably, any efforts to fight this disease are worth noting, for both your long-term physical and financial well-being. To be clear, there's no definitive answer on whether or not Alzheimer's is preventable. According to the Alzheimer's Association website, there's a "need for more large-scale studies, but promising research is under way."

MAINTAIN YOUR BRAIN

Simple things you can do to maintain a healthy brain as you age:

STIMULATE



STRETCH YOUR BRAIN DAILY WITH PUZZLES, IN-DEPTH READING, MENTAL STIMULATION, AND ON-GOING EDUCATION

FEED



EAT A HEALTHY DIET BY REDUCING SATURATED FATS AND INCLUDING PLENTY OF FRUITS, VEGETABLES, WHOLE GRAINS, NUTS, FISH, AND POULTRY

CONNECT



STAY SOCIALLY CONNECTED WITH YOUR FAMILY, YOUR FRIENDS, AND YOUR COMMUNITY

MOVE



GET REGULAR PHYSICAL EXERCISE (APPROPRIATE TO YOUR FITNESS LEVEL) TO INCREASE BLOOD FLOW TO THE BRAIN

While experts in the field continue this important work, the Alzheimer's Association suggests there are things you can do today to maintain and improve your brain health. Yes, the brain is an incredibly complex organ, but taking steps to help keep the gray matter in good shape is relatively simple.

Tease and please your brain

An active mind is a healthy mind, so find ways to stimulate cognitive thinking. Complete a daily crossword puzzle, play a strategic game of cards like bridge, or read an in-depth book on a topic of interest. Even visiting museums or other cultural attractions can fire up the synapses.

Want bigger challenges? Get outside of your comfort zone. Enroll in a class at a local community college. Explore your creative side and

take up painting or sculpting. You might even consider learning a new craft, like woodworking or photography. Whatever you do, just commit to lifelong learning and feeding your curiosity in big and small ways.

Stay connected, especially offline

Cultivating and growing social relationships may support brain health. Staying connected to family is important, and so is community involvement. Sure, picking up the phone or getting online provides some aspect of interpersonal connectivity, but there's no substitute for real, face-to-face human contact.

If you're not a natural social butterfly, start with activities you enjoy. Are you an animal lover? Volunteer at a local animal shelter. Enjoy good food? Take a cooking class with friends. Start a book club or join a travel group. Help out a community school, church, or museum. You get the idea. There are just shy of a million ways to stay connected. And just by participating in casual, common-interest activities, you'll engage your brain in beneficial ways. As the [Alzheimer's Association points out](#), "Social engagement is associated with reduced rates of disability and mortality, and may also reduce risk for depression...and possibly delay the onset of dementia."

Feed your mind good food

The relationship of diet to physical health is, of course, well documented. But eating right can also improve your brain's health. Research and evidence is not comprehensive, but the Alzheimer's association suggests a proper diet may support cognitive function. Both the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) and the Mediterranean diets can help reduce heart disease while possibly reducing the risk of dementia. Here are the basic principles of each:

The DASH Diet

- Eat foods low in saturated fats, total fat and cholesterol, and high in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy.
- Eat whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts.
- Limit your consumption of fats, red meats, sweets, sugared drinks and sodium.

The Mediterranean Diet

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains.
- Avoid butter and choose healthy fats, like olive oil.
- Limit your red meat consumption.
- Enhance food flavor with herbs instead of salt.
- Put fish and poultry on the menu at least twice a week.

These are just two suggestions for diets that may aid brain function. Proper, healthy eating can positively impact many aspects of your life. Consider consulting your physician to learn about more ideas for better nutrition.

Get moving

Physical activity of any kind is good for you—and good for your brain. It's associated with a lower risk of cognitive decline. According to the Alzheimer's Association, cardiovascular exercise will elevate your heart rate, which will "increase the blood flow to your brain and body, providing additional nourishment while reducing potential dementia risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol."

It's possible to combine physical activity with mental stimulation, giving you the added benefit of exercising your mind and body at the same time. Take a walk with a friend or go on a nature hike. Sign up for a dance class or join an exercise group. Ditch the cart and walk a round of golf. Tend a garden. Whatever you do, choose something you enjoy. It's a lot easier to stay fit as you age if you find activities that bring you happiness. Know that it's never too late to get moving. Just be sure to consult your doctor before starting any exercise routine. And always wear adequate head protection when necessary because, well, there's precious cargo upstairs.

Things to Consider:

Some simple things you can do to maintain a healthy brain as you age:

- Stretch your brain daily with puzzles, in-depth reading, mental stimulation, and on-going education.
- Stay socially connected with your family, your friends, and your community.
- Eat a healthy diet by reducing saturated fats and including plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, fish, and poultry.
- Get regular physical exercise (appropriate to your fitness level) to increase blood flow to the brain.