

Taking care of your brain as you age



Your brain and your health

There are lifestyle choices you can make that may help you maintain a healthy body and brain. This brochure can help you learn more about the connection between your body and your brain and about how you can take care of your brain.

Your brain changes as you get older. Many of these changes are normal. For example, some people may have slower reflexes. Others might have trouble remembering things. It's important to note that not everyone has the same kinds or amount of changes.



Factors that affect brain health

Three of the main factors that can affect brain health are:



Your family's genes



Your environment



The health choices you make



Do you have a concern?

Forgetting things, you just learned or getting lost in places you know well, may not be caused by the usual (age-related) changes in the brain. **Talk with your healthcare provider if you have these symptoms or are worried about your brain health.**

Health risks to your brain

The health of your brain is closely linked with the health of your body. This means that whatever affects your body may also affect your brain. For example, your heart helps your brain work by supplying it with blood. If your heart or blood vessels are damaged, you may have a greater chance for problems with your brain.



Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any of the conditions listed below. Together, you can come up with an action plan to help keep your brain healthy.

Here are some health conditions that may affect brain health:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diabetes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depression
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dementia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Injury to the brain
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low levels of some vitamins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thyroid problems



Taking steps to help keep your brain healthy

There are ways you can help keep your body and brain healthy. Making healthy lifestyle choices is one way to do this. The next few pages have tips for healthy living in the following areas:

- Being physically active
- Eating healthy foods
- Keeping your mind active
- Connecting with others
- Having other healthy habits

Being physically active

Physical activity is an important part of an overall body wellness plan. Exercises that raise your heart rate can increase blood flow to your brain and body. This may help reduce risk factors that could lead to brain issues. Some of these risk factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol. Talk with your healthcare provider about exercises that are best for you.

Below are some healthy activities that you might enjoy. Put a check mark next to the activities you'd like to try. Write down your favorite activities in the space provided. Show this list to your healthcare provider to see if the activities you chose are safe for you.



Which of these activities would you like to try?



Walking with a family member or friend



Gardening



Exercising with light weights



Doing yoga



Joining an exercise group



Swimming



Taking a dance class



Playing golf

My favorite activities:

Eating healthy foods

Eating a balanced diet is another way you may help your brain and your body. For example, a healthy diet may help lower your risk for stroke by lowering your cholesterol levels. A healthy diet may also help lower your blood pressure. Many experts recommend a Mediterranean (MED-it-ter-RAIN-ee-un) style of eating. This style of eating encourages you to eat:

- Lots of vegetables and fruits
- Foods containing healthy fats like olive oil and nuts
- Less red meat
- Herbs instead of salt
- Fish or poultry at least twice a week

There are many small changes you can make throughout the day to improve your diet. Check off the changes listed below that you would like to make.



Which of these changes could you make to your diet?



Drinking water instead of soda



Snacking on unsalted nuts instead of salty snacks such as regular potato chips



Drinking low-fat milk instead of whole milk



Using olive or canola oil instead of butter



Eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread



Talk with your healthcare provider about the healthy foods you can eat.

Keeping your mind active and connecting with others

Doing activities to keep your mind active is also important for your health. For example, learning new skills or engaging in music, theater, or creative writing. Connecting with others may also support your overall brain health. For example, being socially active may reduce your chances of becoming sick or impaired.



Activities you can try

In the table below, place a check mark next to the activities you'd like to try. Write other activities you'd like to try in the space provided. A good place to get started is at a local senior center.

Thinking activities I want to try	Social activities I want to try
<input type="checkbox"/> Learn a new skill, such as drawing or playing bridge	<input type="checkbox"/> Join a club, such as a gardening group
<input type="checkbox"/> Start a new hobby, such as woodworking or knitting	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer in the community
<input type="checkbox"/> Take a class at a community college or local community center	<input type="checkbox"/> Join or start a book club
<input type="checkbox"/> Read books and articles about things that you've always wanted to know about	<input type="checkbox"/> Spend more time with family and friends
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

Having other healthy habits

There are other ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle that may help keep your brain and body healthy. For example:

- If you smoke, talk with your healthcare provider about helping you quit
- Try to get enough sleep. Older adults need about 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night
- If you drink alcohol, have no more than 2 drinks a day (for men) or 1 drink a day (for women)

Your healthy brain action plan

Tests your healthcare provider might suggest

It's important to work with your healthcare provider to develop an action plan to help keep your brain healthy. One part of this action plan is to make sure that you are up-to-date on your health screenings. This is important because screenings can help you and your healthcare provider keep track of how you are doing mentally and physically.



These health screenings may be part of your regular care:

- Cholesterol testing
- Blood pressure check
- Blood sugar testing
- Weight measurement
- Brain health (thinking) screenings
- Other routine screenings

What you can start doing

The next part of your action plan is to make healthy lifestyle choices.



These lifestyle choices may be part of your daily life. Talk with your healthcare provider to see how you can:

- Be physically active
- Eat healthy foods
- Keep your mind active and connect with others
- Stop smoking
- Try to get enough sleep
- Cut back on alcohol





There are a number of resources that you can visit to learn more. Here are two to help you get started.

Brain Health

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/brain-health>

Health in Aging

www.healthinaging.org
1-800-563-4916