

The WAM Guide



The Women's Alzheimer's Movement Presents

Tips for a Brain-Healthy Life





The WAM Guide: Tips for a Brain-Healthy Life

Every 65 seconds a new brain develops Alzheimer's. While it is a fatal disease without a cure, we do know there are ways to reduce your risk for developing the disease. The Women's Alzheimer's Movement, in collaboration with our Scientific Advisory Council, has created a guide to help you reduce your risk for Alzheimer's. The fact is, there are simple everyday changes you can make in your life today to keep your brain healthy for the future.

We hope this guide will empower you to take control of your own brain health and inspire you to share this critical information with friends and family.



Exercise

Get moving. Studies show that through exercise you'll improve blood flow to the brain, release hormones that make you feel good, and stimulate growth factor to help create new neurons and synapses in your brain. (Bonus for women: exercise can help alleviate some of the symptoms of menopause and combat osteoporosis.)

Be consistent. The benefits of exercise are cumulative, so it's important to set a realistic, consistent schedule. Work up to doing cardio three times a week and weight/resistance training at least once a week. You should also enjoy the occasional challenge of a yoga or tai chi class to keep you limber and balanced!

Mix it up. Research shows it's the combination of aerobic exercise and weight/resistance training that will benefit you the most. Aerobic exercise seems to enhance overall brain function. Resistance training seems to improve memory and cognitive function.

Move anywhere and everywhere. Movement and exercise do not have to be confined to the gym. Be creative about where else you can increase your daily movement. Walk, don't drive to do an errand. Take the stairs and ditch the elevator. Dance while doing dishes. Learn to move more in your non-exercise time.

Protect your head. Repeated knocks can injure your brain in ways that may not manifest themselves for years. So wear a helmet when you bike or play contact sports.





Nutrition



What's good for your heart is good for your brain. Research shows that it improves every aspect of your health to switch out old-fashioned meat and potatoes for the healthier Mediterranean and MIND diets. That means less red meat and bad fats—and loads more fruits and vegetables, avocados, fish, legumes, beans, whole grains and healthy fats, like olive oil, seeds and nuts.

Fill your plate with colorful fruits and vegetables. Red, blue, purple, yellow, green and orange are more than beautiful colors. Foods of these colors contain the vitamins and anti-oxidants necessary to keep your brain humming, your vision and immune system healthy, and lower your risk for all sorts of medical maladies, from strokes to cancer.

Keep it simple. Ditch the processed foods that increase beta amyloids in the brain. That means saying no to processed meats, cheeses, soft drinks, snacks, breakfast cereals and most other foods that contain a laundry list of preservatives and chemicals. Rule of thumb: the fewer the ingredients, the better for your body.

Lose the refined sugar. It creates insulin resistance, a leading driver of type II diabetes, which can increase your risk for Alzheimer's.

It's not just what you eat, but when you eat it. Research shows that intermittent daily fasting seems to reboot the metabolism by burning fat as its primary fuel. So give your brain a break by fasting 12 to 14 hours between dinner and breakfast. Studies show it will improve insulin sensitivity, a key to brain health.

Replace salt with herbs and spices. Not only will you control your blood pressure, which is good for your brain, but many spices have anti-inflammatory effects. Be generous with the cinnamon, turmeric, ginger, oregano, rosemary and cilantro.

Hydrate. Your brain needs water. Drink eight 8oz glasses of water each day.



Move Your Mind

Challenge your brain. Research indicates that mental activity offers benefits to brain health. Learn something new to create new neural connections. Study an unfamiliar language or take up an instrument.

Play. Train your brain. Research shows challenging your brain can improve your cognitive skills and strengthen existing neural pathways. So have fun with online apps, crossword puzzles and playing games with friends.

Change it up. Take an alternate route to work. Open doors with your non-dominant hand. Stand on one foot while brushing your teeth. Shifting habits helps create new pathways in the brain.

Use it or lose it. It's possible to train your memory. Next time you are headed to the grocery store, use your memory to put together your shopping list. You'll find that with just a little effort, you can fortify your skills to remember.

Play, sing, and listen to music. It touches our brains, our bodies, our hearts and our souls. It evokes precious memories and can elicit deep emotion. It can soothe and reduce stress...or energize and invigorate. Music is a proven and powerful therapeutic tool.

Take a break from multi-tasking. By focusing on too many things at once, you are compromising your ability to store information over short periods of time. Try performing tasks sequentially for optimal brain performance, productivity and accuracy. Your brain will thank you for the chance to reset in a world filled with distraction.





Sleep



Rest your busy mind. Sleep is essential in the formation of memories and also in cleaning out amyloid deposits that can lead to dementia and Alzheimer's. Your brain needs 7 to 9 hours a night, so don't cheat yourself of sleep's many therapeutic benefits.

Exercise for better sleep. If you exercise during the day, it will help clean out your brain at night. Exercise loosens up amyloid deposits, which sleep disposes of at night.

Recharge and reboot. Recharge your tech devices outside the bedroom while you reboot your brain at night. Your devices are a distraction from sleep, and the blue light they emit inhibits the release of melatonin, a hormone necessary to falling asleep.

If you aren't rested, get tested. If you suffer from chronic insomnia, get tested for sleep apnea. Evidence shows it can lead to a quicker decline in cognitive function and perhaps an earlier Alzheimer's diagnosis.

Stay cool. Your body needs to cool down in order to sleep, so help it by turning down the thermostat to somewhere between 60 and 67 degrees.

Honor your sleep sanctuary. Make your bed every day. It's a task completed and a great way to start the day. And it will feel lovely when you get back into it at night.

Lights out. If you wake up in the middle of the night, try not to turn on the light. It will activate the brain by suppressing melatonin. Instead try practicing mindful breathing to lull yourself back to sleep.

Lose the pills. Sleep-inducing medications are not your friends in the long run.



Well-Being

Put out the cigarettes! Smoking is bad for your heart and blood vessels, making it harder for blood to flow to your brain. Smoking leads not just to cancer, but is considered a risk factor for developing dementia and Alzheimer's.

Practice mindful meditation. Meditation is both a stress management and brain-boosting tool. Research shows even a few minutes a day lowers stress, inflammation and depression—and improves memory, mood and even your genes!

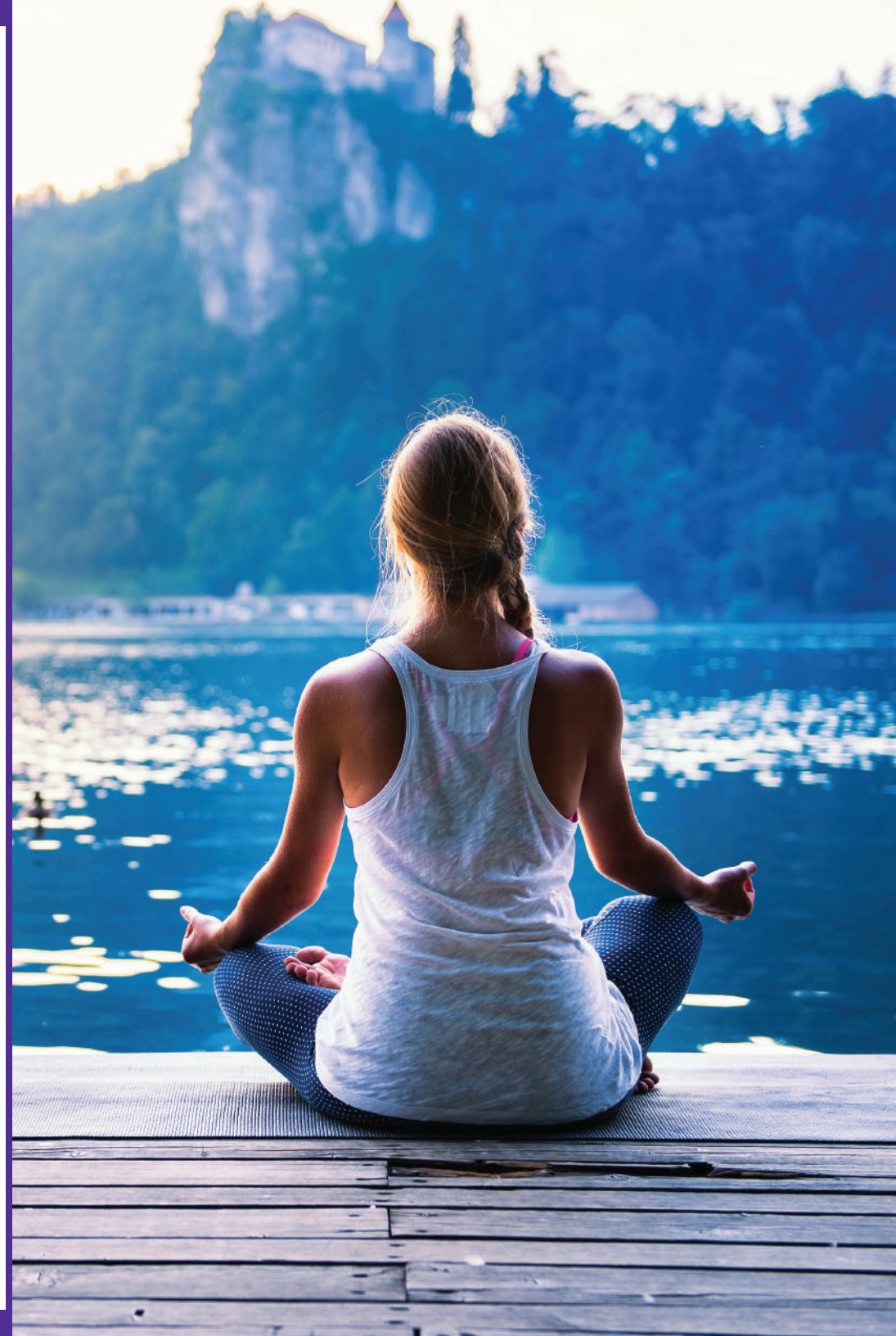
Reduce stress and anxiety. Using breath to meditate is the easiest, cheapest and most portable tool we have to control stress and anxiety each day. Oxygenating your blood while evenly matching the length of your inhale to that of your exhale can relax you quickly.

Get a cognitive baseline. It's important to identify early in life whether your cognitive health is declining. So talk to your doctor about getting a cognitive test as a regular part of your check-up.

Laugh a little—or better yet, make someone else laugh. Studies have shown that humor can relieve stress, help stimulate your immune system and even reduce pain.

Stay positive. Science tells us there is a strong link between “positivity” and health, and that those who have a positive attitude improve outcomes and life satisfaction across a spectrum of conditions—including heart and brain health issues. Then there's the very real fact that a conscious decision to focus on the positive helps us recognize the joy, beauty and grace in our lives.

Take a silent walk. You can observe all that is around you, giving you space to breathe fresh air. Research shows that spending time in nature lowers cortisol, a stress hormone, and is linked with longer life in women.





Social Connection



Love your friends and family. Research shows that social isolation is dangerous to your health—and that people who stay connected and have regular social interaction with friends and family maintain brain vitality.

Never worry alone. Sharing your concerns, depression and grief with others lowers the stress hormone cortisol and increases oxytocin, a hormone that has a natural calming effect.

Engage with others. Sign up for a course at a local college, have a coloring party, or volunteer in the community. It can be more beneficial to turn a solitary activity into something you do with a group.

Make a new friend. Go out of your way to meet someone from a world or country you know nothing about. Being curious about new people, places and ideas will keep your brain engaged.

Remember your stories. Write down your story and memories so you don't forget them, but can share them with others. Memories are the connective tissue that make us and our relationships unique.



Caregiving

It's okay to ask for help. All caregivers need breaks from the physical and emotional demands of caregiving, which can lead to dangerous levels of stress. Have a group of people on call for when you need a break.

Patience is key. Remember that caregiving isn't easy on you or your loved one, but that you are both doing the best you can. Not everything will go as planned, but that's okay.

Maintain a positive attitude. A conscious decision to focus on the positive helps us recognize the beauty and grace in our lives and move forward through even the most trying times. Don't focus on the loss, but on everything your loved one still has to give.

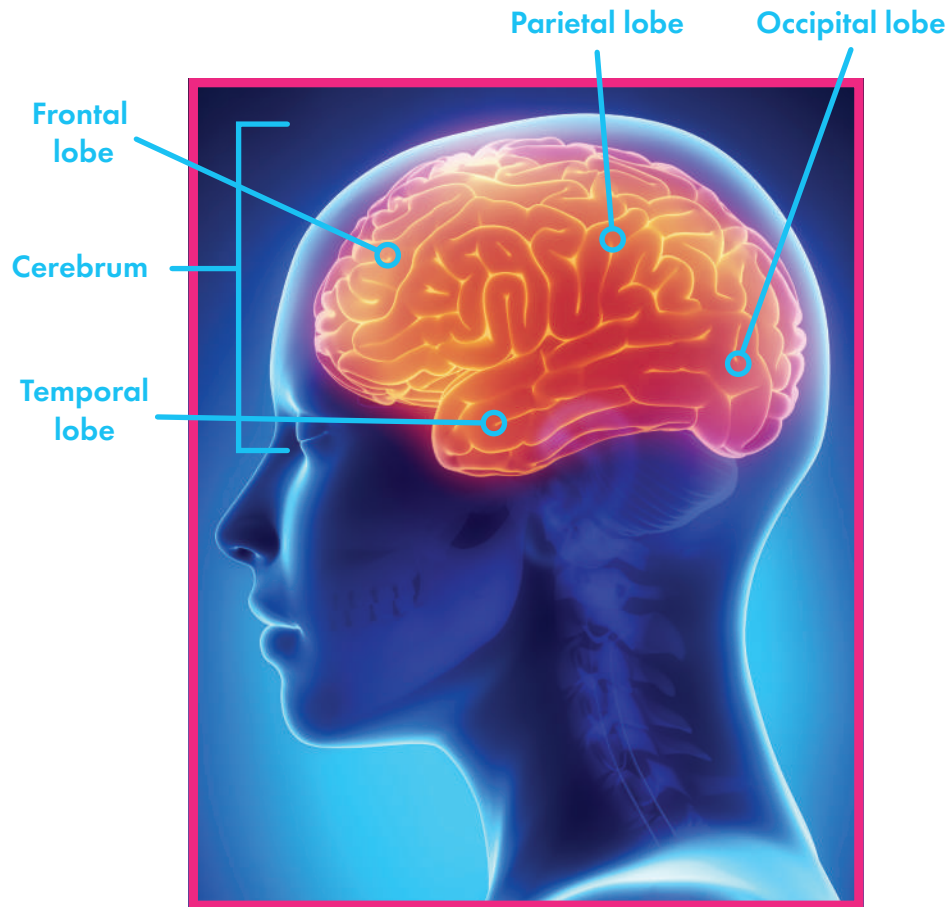
Create consistent routines. Simple tasks performed regularly can help create a reliable structure to the day that can be comforting to people with Alzheimer's and may also provide a rewarding sense of accomplishment.

Music works miracles. Try getting your loved one to take a bath or brush their teeth by chanting, singing or playing music. Music is deeply embedded in our emotional DNA and can often reach a loved one when language and reasoning can't.

Prepare and plan. The moment you get an Alzheimer's or dementia diagnosis, take the necessary steps to put financial and legal plans in place. This allows the person with dementia to express wishes for future care and decisions, and allows time to work through the complex issues involved with long term care.



Know Your Brain



Cerebrum — Includes left and right hemispheres made up of lobes that control all higher functions.

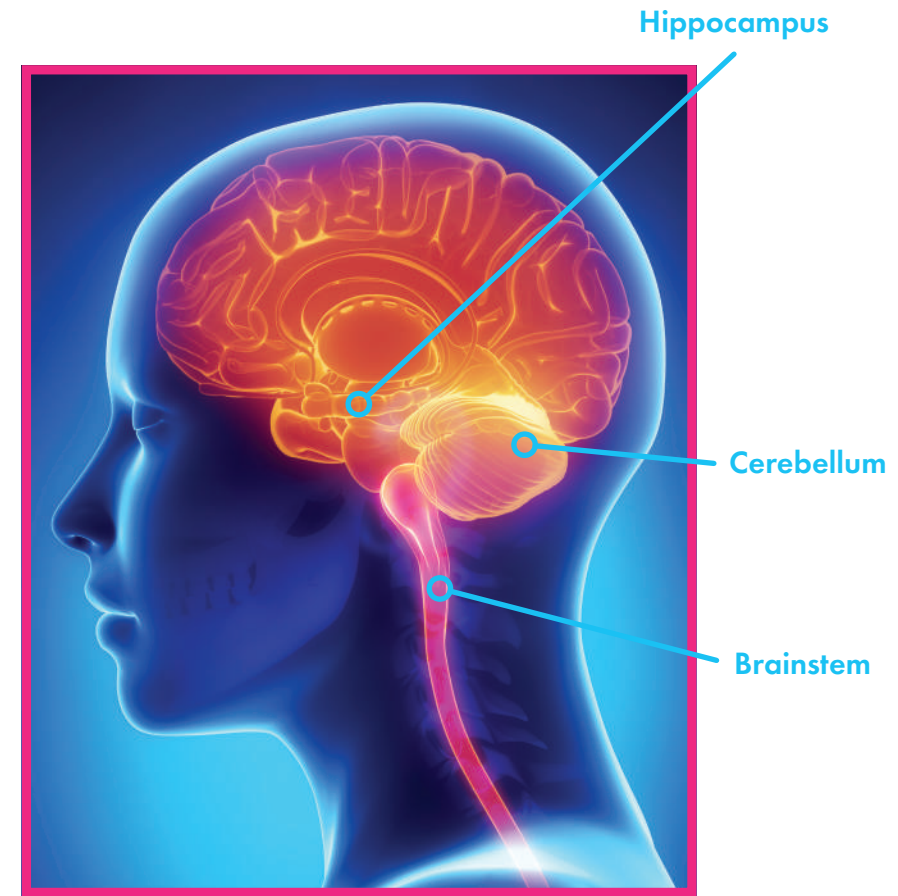
Frontal lobe — Controls problem solving, speech, attention, personality, and abstract thinking.

Parietal lobe — Interprets sensory input including touch, temperature, spatial and visual perception.

Occipital lobe — Handles visual processing.

Temporal lobe — Controls hearing, understanding of language and attaches meaning to long term memory.

Know What It Does



Cerebellum — Coordinates muscle movements, posture and balance.

Brainstem — Relays signals from the brain to the body; responsible for wake and sleep.

Hippocampus — This is the primary memory center of the brain. While Alzheimer's impacts many areas of the brain, this is the one most affected by the disease.

Know the Facts

- Every 65 seconds, a new brain develops Alzheimer's. Two-thirds of them belong to women, and no one knows why that is.
- An estimated 5.8 million Americans today live with Alzheimer's.
- Alzheimer's begins to develop in the brain 20-30 years before diagnosis.
- 2/3 of Alzheimer's caregivers are also women, many of who will have to take time off or resign from their jobs.
- A woman in her 60s is twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's over the course of her lifetime than breast cancer.
- After 60, a woman has a 1 in 5 chance of developing Alzheimer's.
- By 2050, 14 million brains in the US will be living with Alzheimer's, and millions more family members and friends will suffer alongside those diagnosed.

The Women's Alzheimer's Movement (WAM) is working alongside today's leading scientists, researchers and lifestyle experts to better understand this disease and to figure out why it discriminates against women. We believe that by answering this question, we will unlock the other mysteries surrounding Alzheimer's and be able to change the future for all minds.

Know the Signs

In addition to following the brain-healthy tips contained in this guide, it's also important to be mindful of the signs of Alzheimer's. Many individuals may experience one or more of these symptoms in different degrees, but if you notice any of them, see a doctor.

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems.
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure.
4. Confusion with time or place.
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing.
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.
8. Decreased or poor judgment.
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities.
10. Changes in mood or personality.

Stay connected with us online to get the latest info from our community of experts and receive daily brain-healthy lifestyle tips. You can also help us amplify awareness of this issue by sharing what you've learned with your networks and with everyone you know.



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@thewomensalzheimersmovement



womensalzheimersmovement.org



info@womensalzheimersmovement.org

Stay Informed, Pass it On

