

# TIPS FOR A Brain-Healthy Life



Women's  
Alzheimer's  
Movement



Cleveland Clinic



Every 65 seconds a new brain develops Alzheimer's disease, and two-thirds belong to women. While there is currently no cure, data indicates that up to 45% of Alzheimer's disease cases may be preventable through lifestyle interventions. This guide has been put together to help you reduce your risk by adopting a brain-healthy lifestyle. We hope it will empower you to take control of your brain health and inspire your family and friends to do the same.

## KNOW THE FACTS

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Today, an estimated **7 million**  
Americans live with Alzheimer's disease.

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By 2060, almost **14 million**  
Americans will be living with Alzheimer's disease.

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Two-thirds of those diagnosed with Alzheimer's  
disease and their caregivers are **women.**

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Alzheimer's disease begins to develop in the brain  
**20-30** years before diagnosis.

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# KNOW THE SIGNS

It is important to be mindful of some of the signs of Alzheimer's disease. Many people may experience one or more of these symptoms to varying degrees, but if you notice them in yourself or a loved one, consult a doctor.

- 1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life.**
- 2. Challenges in planning, solving problems or retracing mental steps.**
- 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 repeatedly.**
- 8. Decreased or poor judgment.**
- 9. Withdrawal from work or social activities.**
- 10. Changes in mood or personality.**



# WAYS TO MAINTAIN YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

When it comes to doing well by your brain, there are several areas within your direct control that can have a positive impact:

- 1. Exercise your body**
- 2. Exercise your mind**
- 3. Eat well**
- 4. Rest well**
- 5. Stay socially connected**
- 6. Manage health conditions such as smoking, hypertension, depression, hearing loss and being overweight.**

## EXERCISE YOUR BODY

**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 symptoms of menopause and combat osteoporosis.)

**Be consistent** – The benefits of exercise are cumulative, so 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 that a combination of aerobic exercise and weight/resistance training will benefit you the most. Aerobic exercise seems to enhance overall brain function while 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.



## EXERCISE YOUR MIND

**Challenge your brain with new activities** – 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** – 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 alternative 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.

**Build memory muscles** – It's possible to train your memory. Next time you are headed to the grocery store, use your memory to compile your shopping list. With just a little effort, you can fortify your memory skills.

**Play, sing and listen to music** – Music is a proven and powerful therapeutic tool. It can elicit deep emotions, soothe and reduce stress, or energize and invigorate.

**Reduce multitasking** – By focusing on too many things at once, you compromise your ability to store information over short periods of time. Try performing tasks sequentially for optimal brain performance, productivity and accuracy.

## EAT WELL

**What's good for your heart is good for your brain** – Research shows that healthier diets, such as Mediterranean and MIND (Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay), improve every aspect of your health. These diets include less red meat and bad fats and more fruits and vegetables, avocados, fish, legumes, beans, whole grains and healthy fats such as olive oil, seeds and nuts.

**Fill your plate with colorful fruits and vegetables** – Red, blue, purple, yellow, green and orange foods contain the nutrients necessary to keep your brain, vision and immune system healthy while reducing your medical risks, including stroke and cancer.

**Keep it simple** – Eliminate processed foods that increase beta amyloids in the brain. This includes processed meats, cheeses, soft drinks, snacks, breakfast cereals and most other foods that contain long lists of chemicals and preservatives. The fewer the ingredients, the better for your body.

**It's not just what you eat, but when you eat it** – Research shows that intermittent daily fasting seems to reboot the metabolism by allowing the body to burn fat as its primary fuel. Fasting 12 to 14 hours between dinner and breakfast 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. Cinnamon, turmeric, ginger, oregano, rosemary and cilantro are among the flavorful choices.

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

**Hydrate** – Your brain needs water. Drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day.



## REST WELL

**Getting a good night's sleep** – At least six hours a night is recommended to keep your brain nimble. Good sleep energizes, improves mood, and may reduce buildup of amyloid plaque, which is associated with Alzheimer's disease.

**Seek help for sleep problems** – If you experience trouble with sleep, see your doctor. You may also find help with Cleveland Clinic's Sleep app. Visit [clevelandclinic.org/sleepapp](https://clevelandclinic.org/sleepapp) to read more and download for free.

**Get exercise, sunlight and maintain a healthy weight** – You will sleep better.

**Practice good sleep hygiene** – Keep your bedroom dark, don't use electronics before bed, and establish a relaxing bedtime ritual.

## STAY SOCIAL

Research shows that social isolation is dangerous to your health — and that people who 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. 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.





## MANAGE HEALTH CONDITIONS

**Avoid cigarettes** – Smoking is bad for your heart and blood vessels, making it harder for blood to flow to your brain. Smoking is considered a risk factor for developing dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

**Maintain a healthy blood pressure and weight** – These factors are associated with other health conditions that increase the risk of Alzheimer’s disease, so talk with your doctor if you’re struggling with keeping these under control. Take medications as prescribed and reduce sugar intake.

**Get help with your hearing** – Studies suggest hearing loss can increase your risk for dementia. If you’re having trouble hearing, consult with your doctor or audiologist. Getting help may do more for you than just ease conversation.

**Take care of your eyes** – As with hearing loss, vision difficulties are associated with a higher risk for dementia. Have your eyes regularly checked and treated.



**Destress with mindful meditation** – Meditation is both a stress management and brain-boosting tool. Research shows that even a few minutes a day lowers stress, inflammation and depression.

**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 checkup.

**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. A conscious decision to focus on the positive also 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, the stress hormone.

# CAREGIVING

**Seek support** – Caregiving for someone with dementia is a life-changing experience. Educate yourself on dementia but pace your learning. Talk to others who understand it. Look to family, friends and neighbors for help. Be specific about how they can support you, whether by providing transportation to appointments, engaging your loved ones socially or being there to listen.

**Collect important documents** – Assemble your loved one's papers, and make sure they are up-to-date. Consider consulting an elder-law attorney about long-term care and estate planning and learning whether your loved one is eligible for benefits.

**Chart a roadmap** – Discuss with your loved one future plans and specific signs that may indicate a need for a higher level of care, whether by hiring in-home help or moving into a memory care facility. Discuss how to ensure physical and financial safety, including when to limit or discontinue driving and managing household finances.

**Stay by their side** – Make sure you or another trusted person accompanies your loved one to every doctor's visit. Keep a record of those meetings along with any private discussions you may have with the doctor.

**Make and take time for yourself** – It is impossible to be on call 24/7 for a person with the complex care needs that go along with a dementia diagnosis. Schedule time to tend to your own physical, mental and spiritual needs. Reward yourself for the job you are doing.

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# THE HEALTHY-BRAIN PLEDGE

While some health-related factors will always be outside our control, there are plenty of things we can do to take good care of our bodies and our brains. Good habits repeated over and over can enhance our well-being today and set us up for a healthy tomorrow.

Start today by pledging to make just one change!

Then share your pledge on social media and tag us  
**@womensalzheimersmovement** on Facebook and  
**@womensalzmovement** on Instagram

**Today, I commit to making a change – small or large, in one of these six domains that affect my brain health**

**Physical Exercise**

**Mind**

**Food/Nutrition**

**Sleep/Relaxation**

**Social**

**Medical Conditions**

**Today, that change will be:**

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