



## A Publication of the Presbytery of West Virginia

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#### More information:

<https://www.news-medical.net/health/Improving-Cognitive-Abilities-in-the-Elderly.aspx>

<https://thegreenfields.org/cognitive-health-and-older-adults/>

## Cognitive Health and Older Adults Part 2

Cognitive health — the ability to clearly think, learn, and remember — is an important component of performing everyday activities. Cognitive health is just one aspect of overall brain health.

### What Is Brain Health?

Brain health refers to how well a person's brain functions across several areas. A growing body of scientific research suggests that the following steps are linked to cognitive health. Small changes may really add up: Making these part of your routine could help you function better.

- Take Care of Your Physical Health
- Manage High Blood Pressure
- Eat Healthy Foods
- Be Physically Active
- Keep Your Mind Active
- Stay Connected with Social Activities
- Manage Stress
- Reduce Risks to Cognitive Health

Research shows that a combination of these healthy lifestyle behaviors may also reduce the risk for Alzheimer's disease.

### Eat Healthy Foods

A healthy diet can help reduce the risk of many chronic diseases such as heart disease or diabetes. It may also help keep your brain healthy.

In general, a healthy diet consists of fruits and vegetables; whole grains; lean meats, fish, and poultry; and low-fat or nonfat dairy products. You should also



limit solid fats, sugar, and salt. Be sure to control portion sizes and drink enough water and other fluids.

Researchers are looking at whether a healthy diet can help preserve cognitive function or reduce the risk of Alzheimer's. For example, there is some evidence that people who eat a Mediterranean diet have a lower risk of developing dementia.

While scientists aren't sure yet why the Mediterranean diet might help the brain, its effect on improving cardiovascular health might in turn reduce dementia risk. In contrast, the typical Western diet often increases cardiovascular disease risk, possibly contributing to faster brain aging.

Researchers have developed and are testing another diet, called MIND, a combination of the Mediterranean and DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diets. According to observational studies of more than 900 dementia-free older adults, closely following the MIND diet was associated with a reduced risk of Alzheimer's and a slower rate of cognitive decline.

### **Be Physically Active**

Being physically active — through regular exercise, household chores, or other activities — has many benefits. It can help you:

Keep and improve your strength

Have more energy

Improve your balance

Prevent or delay heart disease, diabetes, and other concerns

Perk up your mood and reduce depression

Studies link ongoing physical activity with benefits for the brain and cognition as well, although a strong link between physical activity and Alzheimer's disease prevention has not yet been documented.

In one study, exercise stimulated the human brain's ability to maintain old network connections and make new ones that are vital to cognitive health. Other studies have shown that exercise increases the size of a brain structure important to memory and learning, resulting in better spatial memory. Aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, is thought to be more beneficial to cognitive health than nonaerobic stretching and toning

exercise. One study found that the more time spent doing a moderate levels of physical activity, the greater the increase in brain glucose metabolism — or how quickly the brain turns glucose into fuel — which may reduce the risk for developing Alzheimer's disease.

Federal guidelines recommend that all adults get at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of physical activity each week. Walking is a good start. You can also join programs that teach you to move safely and prevent falls, which can lead to brain and other injuries. Check with your health care provider if you haven't been active and want to start a vigorous exercise program.



**"You can come down now, Everett.  
The children have grown up and left."**