



## A Publication of the Presbytery of West Virginia

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Vol 5 Issue 5 ❖ May 2022

### 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 4

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.

### Stay Connected with Social Activities

Connecting with other people through social activities and community programs can keep your brain active and help you feel less isolated and more engaged with the world around you. Participating in social activities may lower the risk for some health problems and improve well-being.

People who engage in personally meaningful and productive activities with others tend to live longer, boost their mood, and have a



sense of purpose. Studies show that these activities seem to help maintain their well-being and may improve their cognitive function.

So, visit with family and friends. Consider volunteering for a local organization or join a group focused on a hobby you enjoy. Join a walking group with other older adults. Check out programs available through your Area Agency on Aging, senior center, or other community organizations. Increasingly, there are groups that meet online too, providing a way to connect from home with others who share your interests or to get support.

We don't know for sure yet if any of these actions can prevent or delay Alzheimer's and age-related cognitive decline. Still, some of these have been associated with reduced risk of cognitive impairment and dementia.

### **Manage Stress**

Stress is a natural part of life. Short-term stress can even focus our thoughts and motivate us to take action. However, over time, chronic stress can change the brain, affect memory, and increase the risk for Alzheimer's and related dementias. To help manage stress and build the ability to bounce back from stressful situations, there are many things you can do:

Exercise regularly. Practicing tai chi or going for a walk, especially in nature, can restore a sense of well-being.

Write in a journal. Putting your thoughts or worries on paper can help you let go of an issue or see a new solution.

Try relaxation techniques. Practices such as mindfulness — which involves focusing awareness on the present moment without judgment — or breathing exercises can help your body relax. These can help lower blood pressure, lessen muscle tension, and reduce stress.

Stay positive. Release grudges or things beyond your control, practice gratitude, or pause to enjoy the simple things, like the comfort of a cup of tea or the beauty of a sunrise.

### **Reduce Risks to Cognitive Health**

Genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors are all thought to influence cognitive health. Some of these factors may contribute to a decline in thinking skills and the ability to perform everyday tasks such as driving, paying bills, taking medicine, and cooking.

Genetic factors are passed down (inherited) from a parent to child and cannot be controlled. But many environmental and lifestyle factors can be changed or managed to reduce your risk. These factors include:

Some physical and mental health problems, such as high blood pressure or depression

Brain injuries, such as those due to falls or accidents

Some medicines, or improper use of medicines

Lack of physical activity

Poor diet

Smoking

Drinking too much alcohol

Sleep problems

Social isolation and loneliness

