



Texas Talks – Brain Health through Lifestyle Intervention

This content is brought to you by a collaboration between the Alzheimer's Association and Texas Health and Human Services, Aging Services Coordination.

There are many benefits to aging. If you speak with an older adult, you might hear them mention an increased self-awareness, enhanced wisdom and a larger general appreciation. As we age, changes happen in our bodies and our brains. Many of these are expected as typical age-related changes, such as some decline in the ways our brains process information. However, some diseases are more common as we age such as hypertension, weight gain and diabetes. Some impact brain health and functions.

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias result when the brain is compromised. There are some habits to help maintain and potentially improve overall health and brain function as we age. These habits can also help keep your brain healthy as you age. The following information about the impact of dementia can help us better understand why it is important to address healthy aging in the body and brain. Here are some key points from the Alzheimer's Association *2019 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures*:

- Dementia is an "umbrella" term that is caused by many different diseases, each with different symptoms. The symptoms of all of these have one thing in common: they compromise the way the brain works and cause a decline in memory or other functions noticeable enough to affect everyday life.
- Dementia is not a normal part of aging.
- Alzheimer's disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States; 5.8 million Americans live with the disease.
- Texas is currently home to 390,000 people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.
- Some of the risks for Alzheimer's disease include age, genetics, head injury, cardiovascular factors and few years of formal education.

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To learn more about Alzheimer's disease, visit the [Alzheimer's Association website](#). With these risk factors in mind, let's explore **the four key aspects of healthy aging** identified to positively impact the aging brain.

1) Physical Health and Exercise

Many researchers say if people had to choose one thing to do to improve their brain health, it should be exercise. Exercise can directly benefit brain cells by increasing blood and oxygen flow and by reducing other dementia risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol. The recent Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT) MIND Study indicates a direct connection between lowering blood pressure and the reduction of mild cognitive impairment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed recommended guidelines for physical activity which include:

- Check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise program. Find a physician you trust and visit him or her on a regular basis.
- Move safely to prevent injury — wear a helmet when biking to protect against head injury and wear other protective gear when needed for other activities.
- Ask friends to join you — this way you can make it social and get support for continuing with your routine.
- Begin. It is never too late or too early to start. No matter when you start, your body and brain can still reap benefits.

2) Diet and Nutrition

Healthy fueling of the body benefits brain functioning. Research on the relationship between diet and cognitive functioning points to the benefits of two diets in particular:

- The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) Diet is a flexible and balanced eating plan. Studies show the DASH diet lowers high blood pressure and improves levels of blood lipids (fats in the bloodstream), which can reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Because the DASH diet is a healthy way of eating, it offers potential health benefits beyond simply lowering blood pressure, including reducing the risk of osteoporosis, cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes.
- The Mediterranean Diet incorporates the basics of healthy eating along with other components characterizing the traditional cooking style of

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countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. A research analysis of more than 1.5 million healthy adults demonstrated that following a Mediterranean diet could reduce the incidence of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.

3) Cognitive Activity

Anything that uses your mind in a challenging way is cognitive activity and can possibly have short- and long-term benefits to brain health. As you use your mind in new and challenging ways, your brain begins to form and nourish new pathways for connections among brain cells. The more pathways you have, the nimbler your brain becomes. Research has shown engaging in formal education in any stage of life will help keep your brain healthy and can protect your brain from developing dementia. Choose activities you enjoy increases the likelihood you will continue to engage in them over time. Ideas for mentally stimulating activities and keeping our mind active:

- Build a piece of furniture, try a new cooking technique or create something artistic.
- Read books and articles that challenge and inspire you.
- Focus on topics of interest that encourage you to learn.
- Learn new skills and hobbies.
- Complete puzzles and games challenging to you.
- Engage in ongoing learning.
- Seek out opportunities for formal education.

4) Social Engagement

Connecting with others socially can benefit brain health and delay the onset of dementia. There are a variety of ways to connect with others and reap the physical benefits of social interaction. Pursue activities that give your life a sense of meaning. Activities might include:

- Getting together with family and friends on a regular basis.
- Meeting new people and forming new friendships.
- Being active in your community, volunteering, joining a club, etc.

Research is still evolving, but evidence is strong people can increase their brain health and reduce their risk of cognitive decline by making key lifestyle changes, which include participating in regular physical activity, staying socially engaged, and maintaining good heart health. With these previous

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findings in mind, the Alzheimer's Association has launched a two-year clinical trial researching lifestyle intervention on protecting brain health and potentially reducing the risk of dementia. The U.S. Study to Protect Brain Health Through Lifestyle Intervention to Reduce Risk (U.S. POINTER) trial will test if combining physical activity, healthy nutrition, social and intellectual challenge and improved self-management of medical conditions can protect cognitive function in older adults at increased risk for cognitive decline.

Alzheimer's Association Resources

- Information about [10 Ways to Love Your Brain](#)
- Information about adopting [diets for brain health](#)
- Information about [staying mentally and socially active](#)

Age Well Live Well Resources

Age Well Live Well is an HHSC campaign encouraging older adults to be connected, informed and healthy. It provides tools and resources to people and communities to promote aging well. To learn more about the campaign, visit the [Age Well Live Well webpage](#).

About the Alzheimer's Association:

The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. To learn more on this or other related topics, call helpline at 800-272-3900 or visit [the Alzheimer's Association website](#).

Learn More

Start the conversation. Use the brain health worksheet to help guide your conversation with your loved one.

Brain Health Through Lifestyle Intervention Worksheet

When talking with an older adult, you might hear them mention how aging has increased their self-awareness and enhanced their wisdom. They might also mention that their memory is not as good as it used to be. As we age, normal changes occur in our brains, and there are activities we can do to improve our brain health.

Use the following questions to help guide the discussion with your loved one.

- 1. There are things we can do to help our brains as we age like playing board games, taking classes, and stopping unhealthy activities like smoking. Would you like to explore these together? If so, lets develop a plan to include activities you want to do.**
- 2. What new games or hobbies do you want to try?**
- 3. What types of classes are you interested in taking?**
- 4. What is a habit you want to change?**

Hoja de ejercicios. Una intervención en el estilo de vida para la buena salud cerebral

Al platicar con un adulto mayor, quizá le oiga decir que el envejecimiento ha mejorado su autoconciencia y aumentado su sabiduría. También es probable que le diga que su memoria no es tan buena como solía ser. A medida que envejecemos, es normal que en nuestro cerebro se lleven a cabo ciertos cambios naturales, y existen diversas actividades que podemos realizar con el fin de mejorar nuestra salud cerebral.

Use las siguientes preguntas como guía para una conversación con su ser querido.

- 1. Hay actividades que benefician a nuestro cerebro conforme envejecemos, como jugar juegos de mesa, tomar algunas clases y abandonar hábitos, como el fumar, que son poco saludables. ¿Te gustaría que repasemos esto juntos? Si es así, desarrollemos un plan que incluya las actividades que quieres practicar.**
- 2. ¿Qué juegos o pasatiempos nuevos quieres probar?**
- 3. ¿Qué tipo de clases te interesaría tomar?**
- 4. ¿Tienes algún hábito que quieras cambiar?**