

WELL BALANCED

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June Is Alzheimer's Disease and Brain Health Awareness Month

Healthy HABITS FOR OPTIMAL Brain HEALTH



According to the American Heart Association, three out of five people in the U.S. will develop a brain disease in their lifetime. Currently, one in five U.S. adults over age 65 experiences mild cognitive impairment, and one in seven has dementia. Nearly 80% of brain diseases are linked to cardiovascular conditions, and every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. suffers a stroke. With June being Alzheimer's Disease and Brain Health Awareness Month, there's no better time to emphasize the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle to reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

Your brain is your body's control center, and its functions can be categorized into three main parts, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

Part 1: The cerebrum supports remembering, problem solving, thinking, and feeling.

Part 2: The cerebellum regulates coordination and balance.

Part 3: The brain stem controls functions such as breathing, digestion, heart rate, and blood pressure.



Did You Know?

One of the most common early signs of Alzheimer's disease is forgetting recently learned information, such as important dates, events, or names, and frequently asking the same questions. A typical age-related change is to sometimes forget names or appointments but remember them later. For more information on early signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, visit the [Alzheimer's Association](https://www.alz.org).

Brain development is influenced by various factors, including physical health, the environment, social connectedness, responses to stress, and learning abilities and skills. People who have the following risk factors are more likely to develop brain diseases.

- Hypertension
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Smoking, vaping, or using tobacco/nicotine products
- Sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea and insomnia
- Alcohol abuse or misuse
- An educational level of eight years or less, which doubles the risk

To maintain brain health, it's important to be aware of factors that affect it and understand the actions you can take to support it. The following positive actions can lead to short-term and long-term benefits.

- **Eat a balanced diet.** The Alzheimer's Association recommends increasing fruit and vegetable intake, choosing low-fat foods, selecting whole grains, reducing processed foods, and limiting sugar to help lower the risk of cognitive decline.
- **Be physically active.** Engaging in physical activity that you enjoy, raises your heart rate, and boosts blood flow is essential for overall health, including brain health. The CDC recommends aiming for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, along with at least two days of muscle-strengthening exercises.

- **Know your numbers.** Since cardiovascular risk factors are strongly linked with future cognitive decline, working with your provider to monitor your blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol can help you take a more proactive approach with your health.
- **Prioritize sleep.** Getting enough sleep can improve attention, concentration, memory, problem solving, creativity, emotional processing, and judgment. It also supports long-term brain health. However, individuals with sleep conditions such as sleep deprivation, insomnia, or sleep apnea, may experience excessive sleepiness, poor attention, reduced emotional capacity, and impaired judgment in the short term. Over time, they also face a higher risk of memory difficulties and cognitive decline, according to the Sleep Foundation.
- **Challenge your mind.** Engaging in brain-boosting activities or learning a new skill is like a workout for your mind—similar to strengthening a muscle. The more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes, offering both short-term and long-term benefits.
- **Be mindful of your habits.** If you don't smoke, vape, or use tobacco or nicotine products, don't start. If you do, consider this: Quitting can improve cognitive levels back to those of a person who has never used these products before. While quitting may be difficult, your brain health is worth the effort!
- **Protect your head.** Although more research is needed, there is a link between traumatic brain injury (TBI) and cognitive decline. To protect your head, wear a helmet when biking, skating, or playing contact sports. Wear a seat belt and practice safe driving and take measures to reduce your risk of falling.



Remember:

Alzheimer's disease is a form of brain disease, similar to how coronary artery disease is a form of heart disease. It results from damage to the brain's nerve cells.

Some cognitive decline is a normal part of the aging process, but with intentional steps, it's possible to slow it down. If you or someone you know is experiencing more significant changes that seem unusual, it may be time to consult a health care provider.

Additional Reading

- » 10 Early Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's and Dementia (alz.org)

Sources

- » https://www.alz.org/help-support/brain_health/10-healthy-habits-for-your-brain
- » <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-deprivation/lack-of-sleep-and-cognitive-impairment>
- » https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/related_conditions/traumatic-brain-injury
- » https://www.who.int/health-topics/brain-health#tab=tab_1
- » <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity/features/boost-brain-health.html>
- » <https://www.stroke.org/en/healthy-living/brain-health>
- » https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/10_signs

