

Maintaining Your Healthy Brain

The brain is a fascinating machine that we need to take care of! It has great potential and near limitless possibilities, but is also susceptible to environmental risks and deficiencies.

Although aging is often associated with decline across multiple facets of cognition, there are actually only a few areas in which we should expect to significantly slow down; some are processing speed, spatial memory and short-term memory.

What is Dementia?

- A syndrome in which there is deterioration in cognitive function beyond what might be expected from the usual consequences of biological aging.
- Cognitive function is not just memory. It encompasses skills like language, comprehension, judgement and attention.
- Someone with dementia does not necessarily have Alzheimer’s disease, although Alzheimer’s is the most common form of dementia (with the 2nd most common form being ‘vascular dementia’)

Aging does not have to lead to cognitive decline. In fact, 40% of dementia cases are thought to be preventable if we reduce risk factors, and almost 20% of cases are potentially reversible.

Certain risk factors for dementia cannot be changed, but evidence shows that most risk factors are modifiable and early prevention is the best approach!

Here are some of the best ways to reduce your risk:

1. Stop Smoking and reduce alcohol intake. Use CBD and/or vaping in moderation.

2. Manage pre-existing health conditions. Speak with your doctor about proper lab testing and regular physical examinations. If you have any identified health concerns (e.g. diabetes, cardiovascular disease, etc.) then addressing these first and foremost will go a long way for maintaining optimal cognitive function as you age.

MIND Diet Guidelines	
Food	Suggested # of Servings
Leafy greens	6+ / week
Other vegetables	1+ / day
Berries	2+ / week
Whole grains	3+ / day
Fish	1 / week
Poultry	2 / week
Beans	2 / week
Nuts	5 / week
Wine	1 glass / day
Olive Oil	Primary Oil Used

Limit red meat, sweets, cheese, butter, fried & fast foods



3. Diet: The “MIND diet” has some of the best evidence for preventing dementia.

- Goal should be to focus on whole foods that are high in nutritional value, while limiting processed foods and not overeating (i.e. unnecessary calories).

4. Have your vision and hearing tested regularly. Take steps to reduce damage to these vital senses such as wearing hearing protection when near loud machinery and avoiding music at excessive volumes.

5. Physical Exercise: shown to actually increase the size of the hippocampus (an area in the brain associated with memory and cognition).

- Any level of exercise helps! A simple goal is to start with 20 minutes per day or 8-10 km/week of walking. Consistency is key.

6. Mental Exercise: Intellectually stimulating activities help to challenge the brain and build a greater “cognitive reserve.” Learning a new language, taking up a new hobby, trying a new sport or playing mind-teaser games can all exercise the brain!

7. Sleep: Adequate sleep is associated with a reduced risk of all types of dementia.

- **Sleep Apnea** can contribute to your risk of cognitive decline by decreasing available oxygen to your brain. Consider speaking with your doctor about being tested for this condition.
- **Start with simple sleep hygiene changes to improve your sleep quality and quantity:**
 - Use your bed for sleeping and intimacy only
 - Make sure your bedroom is dark and quiet
 - No electronics in the bedroom or before bedtime
 - Avoid caffeine in the afternoon
 - Establish a regular sleep routine (reading, brushing teeth, etc.)
 - Keep a journal by your bed
 - Exercise regularly, ideally not before bed

8. Supplements: Unsurprisingly, there is no silver bullet supplement when it comes to protecting the brain. That being said, targeted natural health products can be beneficial under the guidance and supervision of a professional that knows your health history.

- Consider testing for nutritional deficiencies of iron, vitamin B12, folate and vitamin D.

By focusing on a number of these modifiable risk factors over decades (i.e. starting early), we can expect a synergistic benefit on our cognitive health as we age. For example, the Lancet Journal estimates that just a 25% reduction in 6 risk factors (smoking, inactivity, blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and depression) could prevent 3 million cases of Alzheimer’s Disease worldwide.

The brain is complicated, complex and wonderful. Let's take care of it.