

# A FOOLPROOF FORMULA FOR LIFELONG BRAIN HEALTH

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It's natural for your brain to change as you grow older, but you can protect your cognitive fitness at any age. **Your lifestyle plays a major role in how well you think, learn, and remember.**

Unfortunately, failing brain health is a public health epidemic, according to the American Heart Association. Their research shows that 3 out of 5 Americans will develop a brain disease in their lifetime.

You may sometimes take your brain for granted, but your quality of life depends on it. Keeping it in top shape will help you to overcome obstacles, develop relationships, and complete your daily activities.

Try these suggestions for showing your brain some love.

## **Taking Care of Your Mental and Physical Health:**

1. **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity delivers more oxygen to your brain and helps form new neural connections. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise each week, as well as training for strength.
2. **Eat healthy.** Studies suggest the MIND diet slows brain aging by almost 8 years and cuts your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. It's a combination of the popular Mediterranean and DASH diets, focusing on vegetables, fruits, and meat-free meals.
3. **Sleep well.** Your memory and learning capacity grow stronger while you sleep.

Go to bed and wake up on a regular schedule and talk with your doctor if you have trouble falling asleep on a regular basis or feel tired most days.

4. **Quit smoking.** Tobacco affects more than your lungs. Brain scans show that smoking thins your cerebral cortex, which is responsible for many important thought processes.

5. **Treat chronic conditions.** Many physical health issues can impact your brain. That includes obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, and hypertension. Get regular screenings and follow your doctor's recommendations.

### **Staying Connected:**

1. **Make plans.** It's easy to get so busy that you lose track of family and friends. Block out time for family dinners, date nights, and weekend outings. **Social ties help to slow the rate of memory decline and enhance many other mental and physical health outcomes.**

2. **Be kind.** Do you want to feel more valued and connected? Being generous and warm will draw others to you. Volunteer in your community and brush up on your listening skills.

3. **Use technology.** Face-to-face interactions are usually more meaningful but going online can be an alternative when social distancing or travel keeps you apart. Use video calls and Facebook to stay in touch.

4. **Ask for help.** Healthy relationships are mutually supportive. Let others know your boundaries and when you need assistance.

### **Managing Stress:**

1. **Take time to relax and reflect. Relaxation reduces inflammation and helps your brain to work more efficiently.** Find forms of contemplation that work for you. Savor the present moment. Let go of judgements and expectations.
2. **Slow down.** Pay attention to one thing at a time instead of trying to multitask. Take a break from technology each day.
3. **Express your creativity. Making art raises serotonin levels and enhances brain function.** Experiment with different crafts and hobbies to find something you enjoy. Have fun and remember that the process can be beneficial regardless of your skill level.
4. **Cultivate gratitude.** Recognizing and appreciating your blessings makes you more resilient. Start a gratitude journal. Thank others and look for the positive aspects of any situation. Give back to your community by donating your time and money.
5. **Change your self-talk.** Lighten up on yourself. Make your inner dialogue compassionate and encouraging. Give yourself credit for taking risks and trying new things.

Reduce your risk of cognitive decline. Keeping your brain healthy will help you to lead a longer and more rewarding life.