

## **13 Ways to Maintain Your Brain**

Feed Your Mind to Prevent Disease

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Store shelves are drowning in books and magazines dedicated to the care and maintenance of your body. Your abs, your thighs - even your heart - get special attention. But what about your mind? Why does it seem like the brain, your most important part, is left to fend for itself? Even if there are no bookshelves dedicated to it, you can feed and improve your brain just like any other body part, with more important, more life-altering results.

One of the greatest fears and dangers of growing older is Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is a neurodegenerative disease that is progressive and irreversible. It changes behavior, erases personality and impairs memory and thinking, by causing the brain to develop abnormal protein deposits and tangle nerve fibers that damage brain cells. The chances of developing Alzheimer's disease are partly genetic, but current research is uncovering several lifestyle and dietary factors that also play a role. In other words, you can prevent brain drain with your eating and exercise decisions.

**Check out the following health tips to help maintain your brain power:**

### **1. Be a Mover and Shaker**

Daily physical activity can lower the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, bathing it with vital nutrients and oxygen. Exercise also helps control cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes and weight. All of these increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease. Work that heart muscle, for 30 minutes daily if possible, by walking, swimming, biking, golfing, or hiking.

### **2. Be a Thinker**

Keeping the mind active can help lower the risk for Alzheimer's disease. Stimulate your brain with board games, cards and puzzles. Read a book, magazine or newspaper. Sing a song, play an instrument or learn a new language. These brain-challenging activities increase the blood flow, establish more connections between the brain cells and stimulate brain cell growth.

### **3. Go Fishing**

Eating fish and other food sources high in omega-3 fatty acids can reduce one's risk of Alzheimer's disease. Omega-3 fatty acids are important components of brain cells and may help to reduce inflammation of the brain. Omega-3 fatty acids also help to protect arteries and improve blood flow to the brain. So go fishing for some salmon, sardines, tuna, shrimp, shellfish, walnuts, olives, olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil, flaxseed, and flaxseed oil...all excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

#### **4. Fat Attack**

Saturated fat and trans fatty acids may increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease. These unhealthy fats are found in high-fat meats, high-fat dairy products, many margarines and other processed foods. They promote the buildup of the Low Density Level Lipoproteins (LDL), the "bad" cholesterol. This may cause a narrowing of the arteries, reduce blood flow to the brain, and cause inflammation.

#### **5. B-Vitamins**

Preliminary research is showing a connection between folate, vitamin B-12, and vitamin B-6 intake and Alzheimer's disease. It appears that people with Alzheimer's disease have higher levels of homocysteine (a body chemical that causes arteries to clog) in their blood. Although homocysteine levels naturally increase with age, high levels are also due to a diet low in folate, vitamin B-12 and vitamin B-6. Until more is uncovered about this chemical's effect on the brain, eat a diet high in the B-vitamins. For vitamin B-12, reach for lean meats, fish, chicken, milk and cheese. For vitamin B-6 and folate, include more dark green leafy vegetables such as kale, spinach, and collard greens, broccoli, oranges, orange juice, lima beans, asparagus, whole grains, and fortified grain products.

#### **6. Antioxidants**

The brain can be damaged by free radicals in the body and their oxidation effect. So eating a diet high in antioxidants (vitamin E and vitamin C) can help lower the risk of these harmful effects and protect the brain. Dietary sources of vitamin E include whole grains, nuts, seeds, milk, egg yolks, wheat germ, and vegetable oils. Vitamin C sources include citrus fruits, kiwi, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, tomatoes, strawberries, potatoes, and peppers.

**7. A Boost with Blueberries**  
Blueberries contain compounds that can improve short-term memory, navigational skills, balance and coordination. Current research indicates that blueberries can boost weakened neuron signals. Blueberries contain this powerful punch whether fresh, frozen or dried. Enjoy them by the handful, add them to your cereal, muffins, and pancakes, or whip up a blueberry-yogurt smoothie.

#### **8. Stop Smoking**

Smokers are more than twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's disease as non-smokers. Smoking decreases blood flow to the brain, starving it of oxygen and nutrients. The best defense is to stop smoking, but beta-carotene and flavonoids found in foods may help to offset the effects of smoking to some degree. If you continue to smoke, add more colorful fruits and veggies to your diet. Eat more kale, carrots, broccoli, spinach, cranberries, green and black tea, and legumes.

#### **9. Healthy Heart**

High blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, cardiovascular disease and diabetes may also increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease. Once again, anytime blood vessels are damaged, the blood supply to the brain can be affected. It is important to know your numbers. Monitor your blood pressure reading, lipid profile tests, and blood glucose tests. See your physician regularly. Make appropriate dietary, lifestyle, and medication changes that are necessary to keep your body at peak performance.

#### **10. Stress**

Studies have shown that chronic, excessive stress may alter the brain structure. This makes the brain more susceptible to damage by free radicals in the body and can result in neuron damage. To manage stress, try practicing meditation, muscle relaxation, yoga, or T'ai chi. Talk to a mental health professional. or sign up for a stress management class.

## **11. Ginkgo Biloba**

In the United States, Ginkgo Biloba is sold as a dietary supplement for memory enhancement. It is thought to protect the brain by reducing oxidation damage to the cells. Research has not shown Ginkgo Biloba to protect against Alzheimer's disease, but it may help with very mild to moderate dementia. People with severe dementia showed no improvement when given Ginkgo Biloba. Most of the studies used between 120 milligrams to 240 milligrams daily. Discuss usage with your physician.

## **12. Weighty Issues**

People are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease when a Body Mass Index of 20-27 is maintained.

Weight change is very common with those who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease:

- \* In the early stages of the disease, some gain more than 5% of their initial body weight.
- \* In the later stages, weight loss of 5%-10% is common. The risk of excessive weight loss increases with the severity of the disease.

## **13. Spice Up Your Life**

The yellow spice turmeric may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. This spice is used in Indian cuisine and is a major ingredient in curry powder. Sprinkle on potato soup, chicken soup, omelets, chicken entrees, veal, and cream sauces.

This is the only brain you've got. With some simple maintenance, it can perform as well as your body does for years to come!

As always, you can find more health information and resources on our website:  
[www.CanterburyWellness.com](http://www.CanterburyWellness.com)