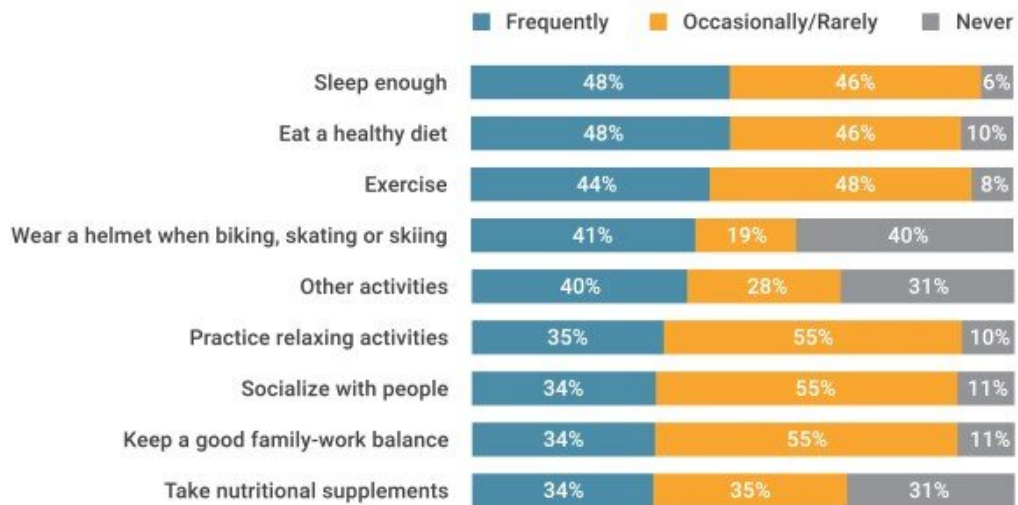


# What motivates people to look after their brain health?

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This is what people do for their brain health. Based on 27 500 answers from the Global Brain Health Survey. Credit: Lifebrain

The prospect of experiencing symptoms of cognitive or mental decline is a key motivation to undertake lifestyle changes for better brain health, according to the second public report from the Lifebrain consortium in collaboration with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

The report is based on 27,500 responses in the Global Brain Health Survey, and provides insight into factors motivating people to look after their brain.

7 of 10 [respondents](#) said they would be motivated to change their lifestyle if they noticed problems with their [brain health](#), such as if their memory deteriorated.

"The challenge with this is that it might be a bit late to start making [lifestyle changes](#) once symptoms appear. Taking care of the brain is a lifelong endeavor, the earlier people adopt healthy behaviors for their brain health, the better," says Dr. Isabelle Budin-Ljøsne from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, lead author of the global brain health survey and author of the report.

Only a third of respondents would be motivated to make lifestyle changes if confronted with a brain disease diagnosis.

"This suggests that people might perceive lifestyle factors as irrelevant once a diagnosis is set and several signs of the disease are obvious" says Budin-Ljøsne.

## **Do lifestyle changes work?**

Half of the respondents would be motivated by knowing that lifestyle changes are beneficial for brain health. Furthermore, half of the respondents would not make a change if they were unsure it would have a beneficial effect, or if they lacked information about what to do.

"People need assurance that changing their lifestyle is worth the effort" says Budin-Ljøsne.

One UK respondent put it like this: "If only there was some good information on the size of the impact a change would make. We all

know [healthy lifestyle](#) etc. improves health but mostly what stops us doing more is not knowing how much of an impact it has. It might be years of additional exercise for possibility of a small gain."

## **Harder to convince older people to change**

Motivations to make lifestyle changes varied across sociodemographic and individual characteristics. Our results suggest that it may be harder to convince [elderly people](#) (> 60 years of age) to change habits than [young people](#) (

Young respondents were more willing to change lifestyle than older respondents, but were more likely to be prevented by lack of time and motivation, or if the changes were expensive.

The report suggests that engagement in brain-friendly behavior and the impact of information may depend on individual cognitive and mental well-being. Respondents who self-rated their mental or cognitive health as poor engaged less in healthy activities. Budin-Ljøsne wonders whether these people may need more support and encouragement to make lifestyle changes than people who self-rated their mental or cognitive health as average or above.

## **People are willing to do more for their brain health**

Around half of respondents already frequently engaged in favorable behavior for their brain health such as getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet and exercising (see figure).

More than three in four respondents were willing to exercise more, relax more, eat more healthily, and engage in more brain stimulating activities. Respondents were less willing to avoid alcohol consumption.

"Overall, these results are positive, as they show that people are highly interested in improving their brain health. Respondents were open to the idea that modifying brain health is possible and willing to act for their brain health, which is an important first step. However, our respondents, who primarily were women with high education, were probably more interested in brain health than average people. It would be interesting to investigate how other groups consider brain health," says Budin-Ljøsne.

The report is based on answers from 27,590 subjects from 81 countries (predominantly in Europe) who responded on questions via Internet in the Global Brain Health Survey:

- Respondents were asked how often they engaged in various activities purposefully for their brain health.
- Presented with the possibility that their doctor told them they could reduce the risk of developing brain disease by changing lifestyle, the respondents indicated how likely they were to do various activities (e.g., exercise more, eat more healthily. etc.).
- Respondents were asked to select the three most important reasons that would motivate/prevent them to change lifestyle to improve their brain health.

The [online survey](#) was available in 14 languages, including French, Spanish, Dutch, Hungarian, German, Italian, and Scandinavian languages, between June 2019–August 2020.

**More information:** [Lifebrain report](#)

[Global Brain Health Survey](#)

Provided by Norwegian Institute of Public Health

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