

Your brain needs proper diet and exercise too

June 21 2022, by Greg Jicha



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Healthy brain aging is a concern for all of us. June is recognized as Brain and Alzheimer's Awareness Month. It's normal to struggle with small things such as recalling names—and we all experience some slowing of the thought processes with advanced age—but everyone hopes to avoid serious cognitive impairment.

Some cognitive difficulties, such as Alzheimer's disease, have underlying pathological causes that we are still working to understand. However, we know that brains can also lose function simply through poor physical, mental and social health. Many of the causes of cognitive decline are preventable.

Just as we create exercise regimens for the body, we should create a routine for brain health.

As a general rule, what is good for heart health is good for brain health. Getting regular exercise, eating well and maintaining a healthy weight all promote a healthy brain.

People of all ages, particularly [seniors](#), benefit from leaving the house, engaging in learning activities and having an active social life. It is important to commit to a schedule that encourages all of these healthy brain aging activities.

Summer, in many ways, is an ideal time to set up a routine for healthy brain aging. Warm weather offers the opportunity to get [physical exercise](#) through gardening and walking. Many community organizations offer [summer](#) classes in dance, photography, art, music and other hobbies.

Summer also is the season of farmers markets and [fresh produce](#). Fresh fruits and vegetables contain compounds called plant polyphenols. These compounds, which help plants fight off disease, have been observed in animal models to extend lifespan by promoting general cellular health. Blackberries, raspberries, blueberries and red wine are all good sources of polyphenols.

Anyone interested in healthy brain aging also can practice "neurobics." These "aerobics for the brain" are activities that can be thrown into the

[daily schedule](#) on a whim. Examples include taking a different route home, shopping at a different grocery store, or purposely driving or walking through an unfamiliar neighborhood. These simple activities activate the problem-solving areas of the brain as the person navigates unfamiliar territory.

Social engagement is key for seniors, who might find their [social circle](#) shrinking as friends and relatives move, develop serious illness or die.

Senior centers offer great resources for social activities. Something as simple as gathering with others for a regular card game can help keep the cognitive functions of the brain sharp. For some seniors, moving into a senior-living community is ideal, because it provides increased opportunities for structured activities and socialization with peers.

Through socialization, hobbies, lifelong learning, healthy eating, physical activity and challenging their brain on a daily basis, most people have the capacity to achieve healthy brain aging.

I have seen some patients reverse mild cognitive impairment simply by adopting a healthier lifestyle—so it's never too late to encourage healthy brain aging.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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