

Six ways to look after your brain health in your 20s and 30s

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Socializing often is a great way to keep your brain healthy. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Dementia is not an inevitable consequence of aging. It's thought that around 40% of [dementia cases](#) could be prevented (or at least delayed)

by changing certain lifestyle habits.

There are now 12 known modifiable [risk factors](#) associated with greater risk of [dementia](#). By focusing on these factors and taking proactive steps early and consistently throughout your life, you can profoundly impact your [brain health and overall well-being](#)—and also reduce your risk of developing dementia later in life.

Here are six of the most important lifestyle changes you can make while you're young in order to look after your [brain health](#):

1. Good nutrition

Nutrition is important for a number of reasons.

Although the brain only comprises 2% of our body weight, it consumes around 20% of our [daily energy](#) supply. This makes good nutrition a crucial element of brain health.

In addition, a good diet helps us maintain a [healthy weight](#) and lowers [risk of diabetes](#), which have both been associated with a 1% greater risk of dementia. A [healthy diet](#) can also [prevent hypertension](#), which is associated with a 2% greater risk of dementia.

One of the best diets you can follow for a healthy brain is a version of the Mediterranean diet. Numerous studies have shown the Mediterranean diet is linked to [better brain function](#) and [lower risk of dementia](#).

So if you want a healthy brain, try including plenty of whole grains, vegetables, fruits (especially berries), nuts, beans and oily fish in your diet. You should try to limit the amount of pastries, sweets, fried foods and cheese that you eat. For most people, focusing on improving your

diet will be better for your brain health as opposed to taking specific [vitamin and mineral supplements](#)—unless you have a nutrient deficiency.

2. Stay hydrated

We're made mainly out of water—[around 60%](#), according to most figures. Keeping it that way and [staying well hydrated](#) supports our brain function as well as our overall well-being.

[Being dehydrated](#) affects our physical and mental performance in many ways—such as increasing feelings of tiredness and causing the brain to [function less efficiently](#). Memory, attention, concentration and reaction time are also [affected by dehydration](#).

Good hydration supports our [brain performing optimally](#) and helps us to prevent steep decline in [brain function](#).

3. Reduce alcohol consumption

Research shows drinking too much alcohol can increase [dementia risk by 1%](#).

Not only does alcohol affect how well [the brain functions](#), it also changes the brain's structure—with [research finding](#) it's linked with loss of neurons (cells which send signals throughout the brain), decreases in [white matter](#) (networks of nerve fibers that enable communication between brain areas) and loss of volume. All of these changes affect how well the [brain works](#).

Drinking more than [21 units of alcohol](#) per week is associated with greater dementia risk. However, the NHS advises people not to drink

more than [14 units per week](#) to stay healthy. Alcohol also [increases your risk](#) of some cancers (including mouth, throat and breast cancer) as well as stroke and heart disease.

4. Keep active

Exercise has many benefits [for the brain](#). It increases [blood flow](#) to the brain that's beneficial for good function, [decreases inflammation](#) and even increases brain [activity and volume](#), making it more efficient. All of these changes are super beneficial for your long-term brain health—and are thought to protect against [cognitive decline](#).

You should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity [physical activity](#) per week or at least 75 minutes of high-intensity exercise per week—or a combination of both. But even if you can achieve this goal, research shows as little as 7,500 steps per day is all it takes to [improve brain volume](#).

5. Socialize often

Social isolation and loneliness are associated with [higher risk of depression](#) and [cognitive decline](#).

But research has found that [good social connections](#)—such as living with other people, being involved in a weekly community group or seeing family and friends each week—is associated with [slower cognitive decline](#). Socializing stimulates our attention and memory and [strengthens our brain's networks](#).

Volunteering, getting involved in your [local community](#) or meeting your friends for a meal or chat weekly are all great ways to [keep your brain healthy](#).

6. Keep learning

Even if it's been years since you finished school, that doesn't mean you should stop learning. Learning has a [protective effect](#) on the brain—with research showing people who continue learning throughout their life had a 7% lower risk of dementia.

Some of the best activities you can do for your brain health include [learning a new language](#), trying a [new sport](#), playing a [musical instrument](#) and [doing puzzles](#).

Other things to remember

Alongside these tips, some other ways you can lower your risk of dementia include [using hearing aids](#) if you're experience hearing loss, avoiding a [traumatic brain injury](#) and aiming for at least six to eight [hours of sleep](#) per night.

The brain is perhaps the most important organ we have. By taking care of it while you're young, you'll ensure it continues to function properly as you age.

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