

# BRAIN HEALTH

## HOW TO HAVE A HEALTHY BRAIN THROUGHOUT LIFE

Our brain controls everything about us: our moods and emotions, our movements, thoughts and words. Some habits like eating junk food, not exercising, smoking and drinking alcohol can harm our brain. Unhealthy habits can lead to early loss of memory and thinking skills and sometimes dementia - a disorder that affects memory, personality and reasoning.

**We can make changes right now - no matter what age we are - that will improve our brains and the quality of our lives.**

## HERE'S WHERE TO START:

*Suggestions are based on current research.*



### EAT WELL

- The best diet for a healthy brain includes lots of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, healthy fats (avocados, nuts and seeds), and legumes (beans, peas and lentils) and NO eggs, meat or dairy. This is a **vegan diet**.
- If you feel that you can't be a vegan, the next best choice for brain health is **vegetarian**, which is no meat or fish. If you can't be a vegetarian, eat as many healthy, meatless meals as you can.
- Beware of trendy diets. They can often help you lose weight in the short term, but may not be good for your body in the long term.

**Avoid junk food, fast food restaurants and most processed (man-made, factory-made) foods.**

These foods often contain a lot of sugar, salt and fat.

**Guidelines for the Prevention of Alzheimer's Disease: "Vegetables, legumes (beans, peas, lentils), fruits, and whole grains should replace meats and dairy products as primary staples of the diet."**

Journal of Neurobiology of Aging, 2014

**?** **GREEN TEA:** Did you know that **green tea** is both **neuro-protective (protects the brain)** and **neuro-restorative (heals the brain)?**

That means if you drink green tea and have an accident that hurts your brain, it will help protect your brain from injury. Even if you begin to drink the tea *after* the injury, it will help.

**PLANT FOODS VS ANIMAL FOODS:** Did you know that **plant foods** have **64 times more antioxidants** than animal foods? Antioxidants help protect cells in your body from damage, including brain cells.

**DR. GREGER'S DAILY DOZEN APP:** This free app helps you **keep track of the healthy foods** that you eat and helps you figure out what you are missing.

### EXERCISE

Cardiovascular exercise - **any exercise that raises your heart rate** - is good for your whole body, including your brain. Other exercise, like yoga, is very good for your body and for relaxation. To really benefit your brain, add cardiovascular exercise which will **increase blood flow to your brain**. Examples of this type of exercise are **walking quickly, jogging, dancing and riding a bike**.

Too little exercise actually hurts the brain.

Cardiovascular exercise has been proven to:

- ⊗ Fight Depression
- ⊗ Manage Stress
- ⊗ Control Blood Sugar Levels
- ⊗ Help Fight Colds and Diseases
- ⊗ Increase Focus
- ⊗ Lower Blood Pressure
- ⊗ Maintain a Healthy Weight
- ⊗ Improve Memory



Exercise and better food choices can help you to keep a healthy weight. Studies have shown that having a heavier body makes us have a smaller brain. **So keep your weight down and your brain healthy!**

## BE SOCIAL

Get out and **be with your friends and family**. If you can't visit or they are far away, talk on the phone or use a computer app where you can see each other. Having positive social interactions is very healthy for your brain. Not being social can create negative changes in the brain. Spending time with others has been proven to:

- Help Slow Dementia
- Help Fight Colds and Diseases
- Make Depression Go Away
- Lower Stress
- Help The Brain Make New Connections

**Get Hearing Aids if you need them. They help you to stay social and keep the brain healthy!**



## LEARN

We all need to **keep learning throughout our lives**, not just while we are in school. NEW learning helps keep and make strong connections in our brain. Ongoing learning (something new for you) helps prevent dementia. Besides learning in school, learn for work or learn a new hobby. You don't have to master each thing. The point is to use your brain differently by challenging yourself. Try to learn in different ways - through reading, doing, watching and listening.  
**Learning can be purely for fun!**



## TAKE CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

**If you are anxious, depressed or have another mental health problem, talk with a doctor or counselor for support.** Begin making healthy changes and let your support person know. Many of the tips on these pages can help. For instance, exercise was proven to be just as good as depression medications after 12 weeks. After 10 months, exercise was actually better. Eating healthfully and getting together with friends also improves mental health. It's okay to start small.

### **Other ways to improve your mental health:**

- *Adopt a pet or volunteer at an animal shelter*
- *Meditate*
- *Do deep breathing exercises*

Let go of stress and worry. Instead of worrying, take steps to make the situation better. Or, if there is nothing to be done, realize that and relax. Most of the time when we worry, the thing we worry about never happens. **Recognize your own Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS)** and replace those ANTs with happy and positive thoughts or do something active like going for a walk. For more help with ANTs, see Dr. Daniel Amen, [amenclinics.com](http://amenclinics.com).

**Be Grateful** - Our brains send positive chemicals out when we are grateful. These chemicals are good for our brain and the rest of our body. Journaling, or **writing down what you are grateful for each day** has been shown to produce positive changes in our lives. No matter what is going on in our lives, we can find something or someone to be happy or grateful for.

## BE RESILIENT

Resilience is our ability to recover quickly from difficulty. Staying in a negative state causes unhealthy stress in our bodies. Try to deal with what's wrong, then get back to your normal, happier state. You are not alone. Everyone's life includes hard times. **Moving in a positive direction helps us to limit the bad effects of stress in our bodies.** Ways to be resilient:

- Commit to finding meaning in a struggle
- Believe that you can create a positive outcome
- Be willing to grow
- CHOOSE to laugh and be grateful (Bonano)

### **To Become More Resilient, Ask Yourself**

1. "What could possibly be right about this situation?"
2. "What in my life or myself can I be grateful for right now?"

MJ Ryan

## FIND PURPOSE AND JOY

**Having a sense of purpose is very good for the brain.** Purpose helps to hold off Alzheimer's disease (a type of dementia) from showing up in your life, even if you already have the changes in your brain.

You may already have something in your life that gives you a feeling of purpose. It can be something simple like taking care of a child, a pet, getting together with friends or knitting blankets for those in need.

If you don't have that feeling of purpose, look for ways to create it through a job, a hobby or relationships. Joy is important because, without it, purposeful things often don't feel purposeful anymore. **It may seem like it should come naturally, but it is okay to branch out and actively find your joy.**



## PREVENT BRAIN INJURIES

As you might expect, all types of brain injuries, (strokes, falls, being violently shaken, car accidents, and tumors) can change your brain.

After one brain injury, people are more likely to have another because of changes in physical abilities and decision-making. **Avoid rough sports and risky situations.**

Think first with any activities about how to avoid another injury. **Always** wear a helmet when needed and **always** wear a seatbelt. Many tips on these pages, like eating right and exercising, can help you avoid a stroke.

## AVOID THINGS THAT ARE TOXIC

Things that are toxic can harm the brain. Toxic things might include pesticides on food, hormones injected into meat, and some chemicals used in beauty products like shampoos and creams.

- 🌀 Buy organic fruits and vegetables when you can. Be aware of what you are putting on your body.
- 🌀 An app like Think Dirty can help you figure out if your housecleaning and beauty products are safe.
- 🌀 Avoid smoking, vaping, illegal drugs and alcohol which are **all** toxic to your body and brain.
- 🌀 **You may need support to make these changes.** You might benefit from a local support group. If you smoke or use recreational drugs (including opioids), make a plan to quit, set a date, and tell your family or friends so they can help you stay on track.

**End smoking:** <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/> and <http://www.tnquitline.org/index.php>

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** <https://aa.org> and

<https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/substance-abuse-services.html>

**Narcotics Anonymous:** <https://na.org> and <https://natennessee.org/>

- 🌀 Even toxic people (including family members) and relationships can harm your healing and cause further symptoms and damage.
- 🌀 For mental health and/or substance use disorders, call SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1800-662-HELP (4357) or TTY: 1-800-487-4889 or search <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

## GET ENOUGH SLEEP

**Did you know that your brain cleans itself of toxins and plaques as you sleep?** If not cleaned, you develop brain fog, memory issues or dementia. **Get enough sleep for your age.**

[https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about\\_sleep/how\\_much\\_sleep.html](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html)

- Treat sleep apnea (loud snoring and short periods of not breathing)
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep a night (if you are an adult)
- Reduce/manage stress
- Reduce use of electronic devices at night
- Stick to a regular schedule
- Reduce caffeine, especially at night
- Drink chamomile tea
- Get rid of your Automatic Negative Thoughts (see Mental Health section)



# MAKING CHANGE

Changing from old, unhealthy habits to new, healthier ones can be hard. But improvements in your health will be worth it. The best way to change someone else's habits - like a child, a spouse or a friend - is to **change yourself first**. There are several ways you can get started.



- ▶ Make **one small change** at a time. Maybe you stop drinking soda this month and give up red meat next month. Keep adding to the changes.
- ▶ Clean up **one area** at a time. This month you switch to veganism or vegetarianism and next month you work on adding cardiovascular exercise to your routine.
- ▶ Change **everything** at once. Focus on food choices, add exercise, change your cleaning products, start a gratitude journal, etc.

Find a way that works best for you to stay on track, like setting goals for every month. If you can, get a family member or friend to make healthy changes with you.

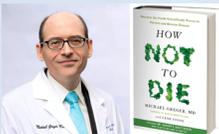
## MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

### COMBINE two or more healthy changes to get more benefits:

- Begin a new hobby that also helps others
- Exercise with a friend or your pet
- Have meatless Monday meals with a partner
- Stop smoking with a coworker
- Go for a walk to a healthy grocery store
- Go to a farmer's market and plan a healthy meal or picnic
- Turn off television earlier at night and make a short gratitude list before bedtime
- Limit caffeine or trade last cup of coffee for decaf green tea and challenge a friend to do the same



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



**Book: How not to Die**  
by Dr. Michael Greger

Dr. Greger's Daily Dozen App  
[Nutritionfacts.org](https://nutritionfacts.org)

National Alliance on Mental Illness:  
<https://www.nami.org/home>



**Book: Memory Rescue** by  
Dr. Daniel Amen

<https://forksoverknives.com>

There are many good books and websites with information  
and recipes for vegan or vegetarian cooking.



<https://www.tndisability.org/brain>

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