

How to Keep Your Brain As Healthy As Possible: How to Decrease Your Risk for Alzheimer's

There are 727 pages of information on this topic from the U.S. Department of Health Website www.ahrq.gov/downloads/pub/evidence/pdf/Alzheimers/alzcog.pdf For those of you who prefer a simplified "Summary", here is a Top Ten list:

TOP TEN

1. **Get Screened for Vascular Risk Factors** and make sure management is optimized: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart and stroke/TIA disease, smoking, sedentariness, obesity etc.
2. **Go Play Outside**. Exercise is the most proven lifestyle choice to decrease the risk of dementia. As little as 1 hour walking per week, in one study, reduced new dementia/Alzheimer's over 3 years by 30%. Both aerobic physical exercise and weight training have been shown to help.
3. **Stay in School and Keep Learning**. More than 15 years in school has shown to be protective but a pattern of lifelong learning has been shown to be more beneficial: attending courses, learning new skills, reading, doing puzzles, playing cards and board games etc. Using Your Brain → Use It Or Lose It.
4. **Eat Like Your "Italian Momma"**. A Mediterranean diet high in whole grains, olive oil, fish, fruits and vegetables and lower in meat seems to be the best choice of eating for brain health. Avoid being underweight or overweight. Avoid junk food and blood glucose spikes (bigger waist = smaller brain).
5. **Put Out That Cigarette**; it is never too late to stop smoking and significantly lower your risk of heart disease, lung disease, stroke and dementia.

6. **Go Play with Your Friends**...and get married. A socially rich life/social networking and a close intimate relationship have been shown to be beneficial.
7. **Don't Worry: Be Happy**. High stress should be avoided as much as possible. Depression is a risk factor for Alzheimer's and should be appropriately recognized and treated.
8. **Use Medication Wisely**. Many prescription and over the counter (OTC) medications may have anticholinergic side effects which can affect brain function. Examples of common medications include antihistamines, smooth muscle relaxants, gravol, and medications for urinary problems. Sedatives/sleeping pills can also affect cognition.
9. **Wear A Helmet/Don't Roll In the Grass**. Head injuries associated with concussion increase the risk for dementia as do pesticides.
10. **I Love to Cook with Wine**, sometimes I even put it in the food. Large scale epidemiologic studies suggest moderate drinkers (1/day for women, 1-2/day for men) have less dementia than non-drinkers or heavy drinkers. This evidence is not scientifically strong enough to recommend a glass of wine as a new medication but is reassuring that an occasional social drink is not harmful. The supposed benefit is from antioxidants: higher in wine than other alcohol beverages.