

HEALTHY AGING: PREVENTION FOR BRAIN AND BODY HEALTH

WHAT IS COGNITIVE DECLINE?

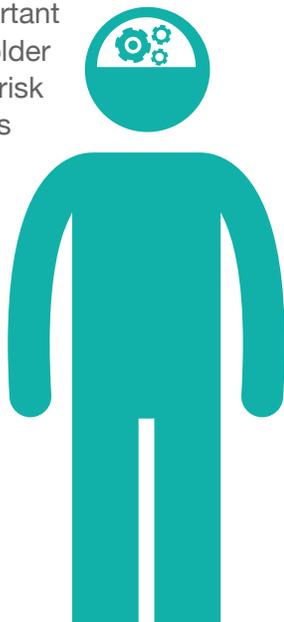
Cognitive decline is when your brain doesn't work as well as it used to. For example, a person who is experiencing cognitive decline may have trouble learning, using language or remembering things. Some cognitive decline is a normal part of growing older. Cognitive decline that happens quickly or that affects day-to-day activities is called dementia. Dementia may be a symptom of a more serious condition, such as stroke, Alzheimer's disease or head injury.

CAN I PREVENT COGNITIVE DECLINE?

As your body ages, so does your brain. You can't stop or prevent it, just as you can't prevent other signs of normal aging. However, you can maintain your health and prevent disease by making healthy choices about your lifestyle, diet and exercise.

WHY ARE PREVENTIVE SERVICES IMPORTANT FOR OLDER ADULTS?

Preventive services are important for everyone, especially for older adults. This is because your risk for health problems increases as you age. By preventing problems, or identifying them at an early stage, you are more likely to live a longer, healthier, and more satisfying life.



PREVENTIVE SERVICES

Many older adults do not get the vaccinations, screenings, and other preventive services that experts recommend. The following preventive services are especially important for older adults:

Influenza vaccine: This yearly vaccine helps prevent influenza (the flu). Older adults should get this vaccine every year. About 85 percent of the deaths from influenza are in people 65 years of age or older.

Pneumococcal vaccine: The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine helps prevent pneumonia. For people who have pneumonia, it helps prevent life-threatening complications. This is especially important for older adults who are more likely to get pneumonia and develop complications.

Breast cancer screening: Nearly half of all new breast cancer cases are in women 65 years of age and older. Between the ages of 50 and 74, women should have a mammogram every two years to screen for breast cancer. Talk to your family doctor about whether you should have a breast exam.

Colorectal cancer screening: Two out of every three new colorectal cancer cases are in adults

65 years of age and older. Beginning at 50 years of age and continuing until 75 years of age, all adults should be screened for colorectal cancer. Your doctor will recommend the right type of screening test for you.

Diabetes screening: Diabetes is very common in older adults. It affects almost one out of every four adults 60 years of age and older. If your blood pressure is regularly higher than 135/80 mm Hg, your doctor may test you for diabetes, even if you don't have any symptoms.

Cholesterol screening: High cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Men 35 years of age and older should have their cholesterol levels checked on a regular basis. Women 45 years of age and older who are at risk for coronary heart disease should also be tested. Cholesterol levels are checked with a blood test.

Osteoporosis screening: The risk of osteoporosis increases as you get older. Women who are 65 years of age and older should be tested for osteoporosis. This test is called a bone mass (or bone density) test.

TIPS TO KEEP YOUR BRAIN AND BODY HEALTHY



Manage your weight. Studies show that obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol all can increase your risk for dementia. To lose weight and keep it off, try to avoid short-term or “fad” diets. Instead, adopt a healthy way of thinking about and eating food.



Eat fruits, veggies and whole grains. You've heard it before – a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains can reduce your risk for chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Those same foods may also help protect brain function. The antioxidants in leafy greens, cruciferous (such as

broccoli, cabbage and turnips) and dark-skinned vegetables may be especially protective.



Avoid saturated fats. Foods high in saturated fats and cholesterol, such as red meat and whole-milk dairy products, can contribute to high blood cholesterol levels. Over time, high cholesterol can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke. To limit your intake of saturated fats, use olive oil or canola oil instead of butter. When you eat meat, choose poultry or fish. Also, choose low-fat or nonfat dairy products over whole-milk products.



Get your omega-3s. The most common source of omega-3 fatty acids is fatty fish, such as sardines, tuna, salmon, mackerel and herring. To get your omega-3s, try to eat one of these fish once or twice a week.



Stay active – physically, socially and mentally. Physical activity helps prevent disease and maintain blood flow to the brain. If you don't already exercise, try to work up to 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 times a week. Walking, hiking, bicycling and swimming are all good options.



Social interaction helps stimulate your mind. Social activities are any activity you do with other people. It can be as simple as having lunch with a friend or walking around the block with a neighbor.



Finally, to keep your brain cells strong and active, it's important for you to stay mentally active. Challenge yourself to learn something new. Read newspapers, books and magazines. Enroll in a class at the local community college or adult education center. Or, challenge yourself in a different way by playing games, completing puzzles or trying memory exercises.

REFERENCES

All information sourced from FamilyDoctor.org, a resource operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)