

Brain Health & Aging

*Six Steps to a Better Memory
and Reducing Your Risk for
Alzheimer's Disease*



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African Americans have over twice the rate of Alzheimer's disease. This is most likely due to lifestyle. The GOOD NEWS is that you can take control of your own brain health. You have the power to cut your risk for Alzheimer's disease in half by making these six changes to your habits and lifestyle.

1. Exercise Regularly

Exercise improves memory, mood and brain function. It reduces stress, improves sleep, lowers risk for stroke, manages your blood sugar and increases blood flow to the brain: all of which improve memory. *The more fit you are, the lower your chance of getting Alzheimer's disease.*

- **Walk** for half an hour or more each day.
- Get 2 ^{1/2} hours a week of **cardio exercise**.



2. Challenge Your Brain

Your brain is like a muscle: Use it or lose it! Your brain can actually shrink from lack of use. *People who stay mentally active have lower rates of Alzheimer's disease.*



- **Learn** a new skill, or a new language.
- If you play a musical instrument, **keep practicing.**
- **Read** challenging books about topics that are new to you.
- **Keep your mind sharp** completing crossword puzzles and attending lectures.

3. Manage Stress

Experiencing moderate stress can sometimes be helpful for completing tasks that require speed, focus and alertness. However, when you are very stressed, your brain has difficulty retaining newly learned information. *Warning: Being regularly and repeatedly stressed will damage memory cells in your brain and increase risk for Alzheimer's.*



- **Combat stress** through regular exercise and better sleep.
- **Learn stress reduction methods:** yoga and mindfulness classes can teach you to better manage stress.

4. Get a Good Night's Sleep

Quality sleep is essential for retaining newly learned skills and memories. Poor sleep can lead to an impaired ability to manage stress. Even a short nap can improve memory retention. *Disrupted sleep, or too little sleep, puts you at greater risk for Alzheimer's disease and memory impairments.*



- Keep to a **regular bedtime.**
- Sleep at least **7 ¹/₂ hours a night.**
- Keep your room totally **dark and cool.**
- **No phone or computer screens** in the bedroom.
- **Avoid alcohol and caffeine** in the afternoon or evening.

5. Socialize with Others

Socializing improves memory, probably because of the benefits from human interaction and intellectual stimulation when we are in each other's company. *Being socially isolated increases risk for Alzheimer's disease.*



- Even if you live alone, you can have a rich social life: **friendship is key to brain health!**
- **Talking regularly with friends and family** keeps your mind alive and preserves memories.
- **Partner dancing** is good for both socializing and exercise.

6. Eat Light and Healthy

Try to maintain a healthy weight for your age and height. Lose weight if you are overweight or obese. *Obesity doubles your risk for Alzheimer's disease.*

Reduce unnecessary added sugar: it is toxic for the brain. Avoid high fructose corn syrup additives. Read food labels!



Eat brain and heart-healthy foods like:

- **Dark fruits:** blueberries and prunes;
- **Vegetables:** broccoli and spinach;
- **Cold water fish:** tuna and salmon;
- **Nuts:** almonds, walnuts, and pecans;
- **Beans** are high in protein and a good alternative to meat.

**You can join the fight against
Alzheimer's disease by becoming a
paid participant in research on
Aging & Brain Health at
Rutgers University-Newark:
call (973) 353-3673**

If you are African American, **60 or older**, you can participate in studies on aging and brain health, and be paid for your time.

The purpose of the study is to answer the questions: **How do our daily habits and activities affect our brain health over time? Which lifestyle choices can help reduce your risk for getting Alzheimer's Disease?**

As part of this study, an MRI brain scan is offered to healthy participants at no charge. Participants are invited to return every two years (or every year after they turn 80).