

Regardless of age, healthy brains...

- learn new information,
- create and recall memories,
- and adapt to changes and challenges.

Unless a person is making a purposeful change, their character traits and personality remain steady through life. A significant or sudden shift in these areas can indicate a need for assessment.

Research tells us that most older adults report greater satisfaction with life and that wisdom and insight actually improve with age.

The aging process can...

- require reinforcement or repetition when committing new information to memory,
- slow down the processing time for calculations, recollection of information and multi-tasking (especially under stress),
- increase vulnerability for brain illness and injury resulting from:
 - falls,
 - medication side effects,
 - alcohol use,
 - hearing, vision or other sensory changes,
 - isolation,
 - and/ or stress.

Tips for a Healthy Brain

Eat nutritious foods: Healthy brains depend on the vitamins, minerals, fats, and proteins found in healthy foods. Hydration is just as important as nutrition, so make sure to drink plenty of water every day..

Keep your body moving: Regular exercise boosts mood, memory and motivation. Your brain needs the blood flow and oxygen that comes from serious exercise (even when you are seated).

Practice mental fitness: Our brains thrive on challenges, activities and a balance of stimulation and rest. Stay mentally fit by learning new skills, building your interests, practicing positive thinking and making sure you get plenty of sleep.

Stay engaged: Stay involved in your community and develop relationships with old and new friends. Connect with people, pets, places, and interests that energize you.

Learn to manage stress: We can learn new coping skills, flexibility and resiliency at any age which is important when life takes challenging turns. Expand your support network and ask for help when you need it.

Visit mdaging.org to learn more about brain health and aging, and order a free guidebook with further information and resources.



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Did you know?

Keeping your brain healthy as you age



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Your brain's health is VERY important.

When you think about health, do you think about your brain? Just like any other organ of the body, brains experience varying levels of wellness throughout a lifetime. When the brain is unwell, it can affect:

- physical well-being and levels of pain,
- the ability to focus and concentrate,
- mood,
- motivation and desire to participate in activities,
- appetite,
- sleep,
- self-esteem,
- attitude,
- beliefs,
- communication and relationships,
- behavior,
- and/ or reactions to people, places and things.

Risk factors

Brains do not become unwell simply by growing older. However, many common age related changes can cause stress and put our brains at risk for becoming unwell. Some of these risk factors include:

- sensory changes, such as hearing and vision loss,
- pain and functional limitations,
- chronic health conditions,
- isolation and loneliness,
- significant loss,
- and use of medications.

Feeling unwell is not uncommon or something to be ashamed about: one in four older adults experience depression, anxiety, dementia, substance use problems, chronic stress or other distressing brain condition. For those who experienced these problems earlier in life and recovered, the risk factors listed above can potentially cause symptoms to return.

Symptoms can include:

- worsening health conditions and pain,
- disturbances in sleep or appetite,
- difficulty focusing and concentrating,
- loss of interest or withdrawal from preferred activities and people,
- moodiness, irritability, or negativity,
- changes in behavior, quality of thought or quality of life.

Recovery happens

Whether you've lived with a brain health condition for years or are experiencing one for the first time, it is possible to feel well again.

- **Get screened:** Accurate identification of a brain health problem is an important step towards recovery. Tell your health professional about any problematic symptoms and ask them to use a screening and assessment tool for older adults.
- **Get treatment:** Older adults benefit from a variety of treatment types, alone or in combination, depending on the illness and severity of the condition. Treatment options include: nutrition, meditation, expressive therapies (art, music, movement, drama), talk therapy, peer support, faith-based approaches, medication, clinical treatment, and more.
- **Develop resiliency:** Positive coping strategies and resilience are key skills for "successful" aging. They can be learned at any age and gained through peer support, which occurs when people share experiences, strength, hope, and a commitment to recovery.

