

# BETTER BRAIN HEALTH



By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans are estimated to be age 65 or older. A rapidly aging population means more people will be at risk for developing dementia. However, even though age is a major risk factor, **dementia is not a normal part of aging**. There are actions we can take to improve and maintain our brain health throughout the years.

**Dementia** is not a specific disease, but a general term for decline in mental ability that is severe enough to interfere with daily life. In other words, it refers to things like memory loss caused by certain diseases and medical conditions. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia.

## Dementia risk factors:

- Uncontrollable: age, family history, genetics
- Controllable: Poor heart health, head injuries, lack of exercise, poor diet, not being mentally or socially active

## Promoting better brain health:

- **Maintain a healthy heart.** Damage to heart or blood vessels can also cause damage to the brain. Keep blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar under control. Avoid or quit smoking. Maintain a healthy weight.
- **Exercise.** Aim for 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. That's about 30 minutes five days a week.
- **Protect brain from injury.** Learn to prevent falls, wear seatbelts, practice safe driving, and wear a helmet. Managing stress and controlling anxiety and depression is important too!
- **Eat well.** Plant-based diets rich in fruits and veggies and low in unhealthy fats and "junk foods" can impact brain function. Learn more about the Mediterranean, DASH, and MIND diets.
- **Keep learning.** An active mind at any age promotes new brain cell connections. Challenge your brain by taking classes, trying new things, reading, playing games, doing puzzles, and more!
- **Socialize.** Stay in touch with family and friends, get involved with community groups, and volunteer.

## Normal signs of aging vs. signs of dementia

### Normal aging

- Sometimes forgetting the right word
- Losing things from time to time
- Missing a monthly payment
- Being able to maintain social skills
- Pausing for a second to remember the way

### Dementia

- Trouble having a conversation
- Misplacing things often and being unable to find them
- Consistent problems taking care of bills
- Loss of interest in social activities
- Getting lost in familiar places; may take hours to return home

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Alzheimer's Association:  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin: [www.alzwisc.org](http://www.alzwisc.org)

Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center: [www.adrc.wisc.edu](http://www.adrc.wisc.edu)

