

WELLNESSMONTHLY

Thinking About Brain Health and Head Protection | **March 2021**



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Thinking About Brain Health and Head Protection

Brain health involves optimizing cognitive, emotional, psychological and behavioral functioning.

Interconnected social, biological and genetic determinants play a role in brain development and health from conception through the end of life. They influence the way your brain has developed and how it responds to stress.

What you eat and drink, how much sleep you get and your physical fitness affect brain health. These are complex, interconnected processes. Experts

recommend focusing on the big picture of overall health rather than relying on individualized remedies or specific behaviors to nurture your brain.

Nutrition

In general, a balanced diet that consists of low-fat, non-processed foods, and fresh fruits and vegetables is recommended. Lately, research has focused on health benefits associated with the anti-inflammatory properties of a plant-based, Mediterranean-style diet.

Not all of the same foods are created equal because climate and growing conditions alter the quantity of nutrients, minerals and hormones they contain. Certain food-type combinations can also affect your body and mind. Keeping a journal to track how certain foods make you feel can be used to identify those that seem to increase energy or help relieve stress.

If you are looking for “brain food,” try fatty fish like salmon, trout and sardines. Fatty fish contains omega-3 fatty acids that help build brain and nerve cells, support learning and memory, and may help relieve depression. Other brain-food examples include blueberries, which have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects that target declines in brain function, and broccoli, which contains vitamin K for memory.

Sleep and Insomnia

Seven to nine hours of sleep a night is recommended for adults. Good sleep hygiene includes going to bed and getting up at about the same time every day. Quality sleep is more likely when the room is dark and quiet. People who work night shifts have to adjust their lifestyle to make sure they get enough rest.

Many Americans have insomnia, a common byproduct of stress. With insomnia, you may experience daytime fatigue and drowsiness, have poor concentration, and feel anxious or irritable. If you have insomnia, pay close attention to sleep hygiene, avoid stimulants like caffeine, turn off electronic devices before bed (your brain interprets

blue light as daylight) and try relaxation techniques. Consult your health care provider before taking sleep remedies.

Exercise

When done on a routine basis, moderate-to-rigorous physical activity produces healing brain chemicals – and exercise helps encourage better sleep quality. It also promotes cardiovascular health and weight management. In the evening, yoga, gentle stretching and deep breathing exercises are recommended.

Brain Health Precautions

Some people are tempted by products that claim to make the brain sharper or prevent dementia. It's wise to be cautious about certain [supplements](#), brain-training computer games and other products that promise to improve memory or prevent brain disorders. There is no drug or treatment that prevents Alzheimer's or [related dementias](#), according to the National Institute on Aging.

To help protect yourself and others:

- Beware of product claims that conflict with what you've heard from your doctor
- Question products that claim to be a "scientific breakthrough"
- Check with your health care provider before buying dietary supplements

Head Protection

It's also important to take steps to prevent brain injuries, which are a leading cause of death and disability in the U.S. An estimated 2.8 million Americans sustain a traumatic brain injury each year from falls, being struck by or against something, in motor vehicle accidents, during assaults and from other causes.

March is [Brain Injury Awareness Month](#). Here are some head injury prevention tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

1. Always wear a seat belt when driving or riding in a moving vehicle.
2. Use hard hats and other personal protective equipment as recommended.
3. Do not drive while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
4. Wear protective gear during recreational/sport activities.
5. Take precautions at work and home to prevent slips, trips and falls.
6. Do exercises to improve your balance and leg strength.

Consistency is the key to nurturing brain health throughout your life.



Managing Mental Exhaustion

When you feel burned out, you may be experiencing mental exhaustion in response to prolonged exposure to stressful situations. The following are signs and symptoms of mental exhaustion:

- 1. Emotional:** Depression, anxiety, apathy, anger, indecision and pessimism
- 2. Physical:** Fatigue, headaches, upset stomach, body aches, weight change and insomnia
- 3. Behavioral:** Work absence, presenteeism, social isolation and substance abuse

Burnout is associated with the development of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and suppressed immunity, which means you are more susceptible to infection and illness.

If you are suffering from mental exhaustion, consult with a medical professional.

Ignoring symptoms or trying to push through has emotional and physical consequences. It's better for your health to take a step back, re-evaluate and then re-engage.