

# Mind Matters: Supporting Brain Health in Older Adults

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# Introductions



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# Learning Objectives

## Today we will...

- Learn how normal brain changes differ from dementia
- Review the latest evidence on dementia prevention.
- Explore concrete strategies to protect brain health and remain cognitively fit.

**What are normal age-related changes in the brain?**

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# Cognitive decline and normal aging

- Cognitive decline affects thinking, memory, and quality of life
- **Executive functioning** (planning, problem-solving, multitasking, etc.) declines with age, especially after age 70
- Some age-related cognitive decline is normal and different from Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and dementia

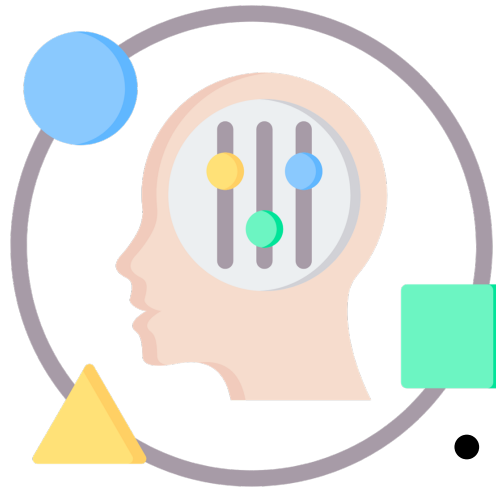


(Bajpai et al., 2022; Harada, Natelson Love, & Triebel, 2014)

## Learned Knowledge (*Crystallized Intelligence*)

- Facts, vocabulary, life experience
- Grows stronger with age

Older adults often shine when using knowledge gained over time.



## Quick Thinking (*Fluid Intelligence*)

- Solving new problems
- Thinking fast and remembering things
- Slows down with age

# Is it normal aging or memory loss?

<b>Age-Related Change</b>	<b>Dementia</b>
Missing a dentist appointment and realizing the next day.	Asking daughter 3 times when her granddaughter's birthday is
Calling a grandson for help in installing an app on his new "smart phone"	Trying to use one's portable phone to change the channel on the television

# Can we “prevent” dementia?

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- Dementia is caused by various diseases—there is no single cause.
- Because of this, there is no one-size-fits-all prevention strategy.
- However, research shows that people with dementia often share common risk factors.
- Identifying and addressing these risk factors may help reduce the likelihood of developing dementia.



**What are some way you can  
protect your brain?**

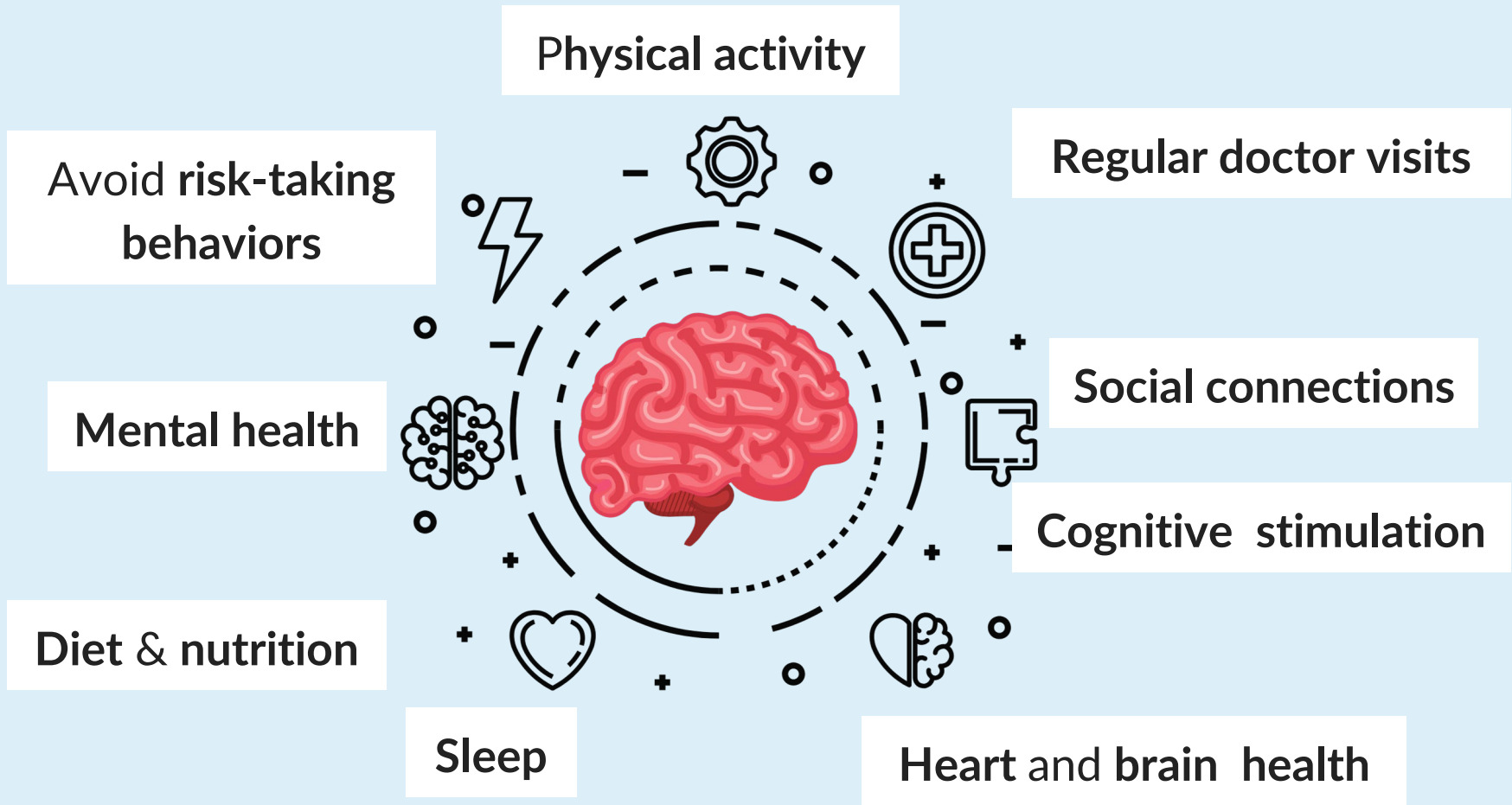


# US Pointer Study: Lifestyle Interventions for Brain Health

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## Brain Health “Recipe”

- Physical exercise
- Cognitive exercise
- Nutrition
- Health monitoring





**Monitor  
Your  
Physical  
Health!**

## 6 health risks linked to dementia

1. Hearing Loss & Vision Loss
2. High Blood Pressure
3. High Cholesterol
4. Diabetes (Type 2)
5. Obesity
6. Health Inequities

# Sleep = The brain's spring cleaning

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- Sleep helps your **heart, immune system, and memory.**
- While you sleep, your brain **cleans out waste**—like taking out the trash.
- **Too little sleep** means the brain can't clean up properly.
- Sleeping **less than 6 hours a night** may increase your **risk of dementia.**

(Budson, 2021; Nedergaard & Goldman, 2020)

# Avoiding risk-taking behaviors: Alcohol

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- Heavy alcohol use reduces **gray matter**, increasing dementia risk
- **Alcohol-related loss of consciousness** (e.g., from TBIs) linked to higher risk
- **Alcoholic dementia** is a known condition tied to long-term abuse
- **Reducing alcohol intake** has a protective effect on brain health
- Some studies show **non-drinkers** have higher dementia risk than moderate drinkers  
Likely because many non-drinkers were formerly heavy drinkers (Lancet Commission)

(Livingston et al., 2024; Livingston et al., 2020; Long, S., Benoist, C., & Weidner, 2023)

# Avoiding risk-taking behaviors: Smoking & Pollution

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- **Midlife smoking (as early as 30s)** linked to increased dementia risk
- **Quitting smoking** at any age lowers dementia risk compared to continued use
- **Secondhand smoke:** limited evidence on direct dementia risk
- **Air pollution** affects brain health—not just heart and lung function
- Risks are **higher for individuals with cardiovascular conditions**
  - Reinforces how **interconnected dementia risk factors** are

(Livingston et al., 2024; Livingston et al., 2020; Long, S., Benoist, C., & Weidner, 2023)

# Benefits of exercise on cognition

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- Increased blood flow to the brain
- Increased protective chemicals in the brain
- May also increase the size of the hippocampus (where memories are formed)
- Helps reduce inflammation in the brain
- Boosts connections between neurons



**What is good for your heart is good  
for your brain!**

# Dancing for brain health

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Dance requires complex mental and physical coordination

- Combines physical activity, music, and social connection
- Improves memory, mood, coordination, and focus
- Strengthens brain areas tied to thinking, long-term memory, decision-making, and spatial recognition



# Sustaining a healthy diet

## The MIND diet

- A combination of the Mediterranean and DASH diets
- Specifically designed to promote brain health and reduce the risk of Alzheimer's
- A study from Chicago researchers found that adherence to the MIND diet was associated with a reduction in Alzheimer's risk

Strict followers  
of the MIND  
diet reduced risk  
by  
**53%**

Moderate  
followers still  
reduced risk by  
**35%**

# The Mind Diet :

## Foods to eat:

Leafy greens 6Xs a week

Nuts 5Xs a week

Berries 3Xs a week

Beans 3Xs a week

Whole grains 3 servings/day

Fish 1X a week

Poultry 1X a week

Cook with olive oil



## Foods to limit:

Red meat <4Xs a week

Butter <1 tablespoon per day

Cheese <1 serving a week

Sweets <5Xs a week

Fried food <1X a week





# The Mind Diet : Meal Plan Example



<b>Breakfast</b>	<b>Snack</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Snack</b>	<b>Dinner</b>
Scrambled eggs with spinach & onions (olive oil) Whole wheat toast Blueberries Coffee or tea	Apple slices with peanut butter	Turkey sandwich on whole grain bread (lettuce, tomato, mustard) Carrots & cucumbers with hummus Water or iced tea	Handful of unsalted almonds or mixed nuts	Grilled salmon Roasted sweet potatoes Asparagus Dark chocolate for dessert

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Staying socially  
active is  
essential to  
mental and  
physical health!



# Resources for social engagement

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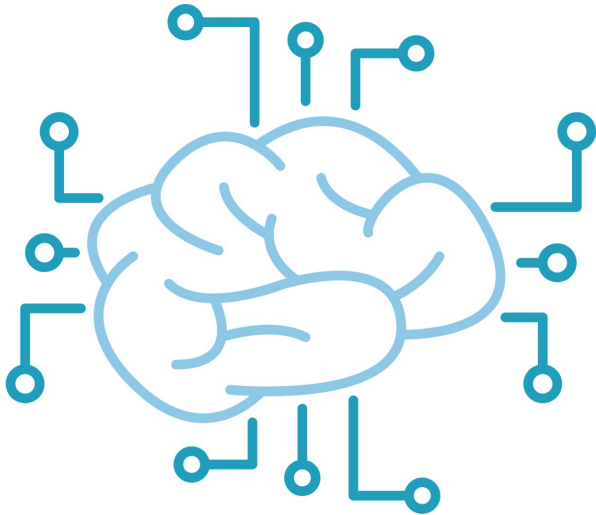
- Senior centers & faith communities
- Telephone reassurance programs
- Clubs, organizations, group events
- Volunteer opportunities



Image from the Bev Roy Hope Foundation's Memory Café in St. Charles, MO

# Engage in cognitively-stimulating activities

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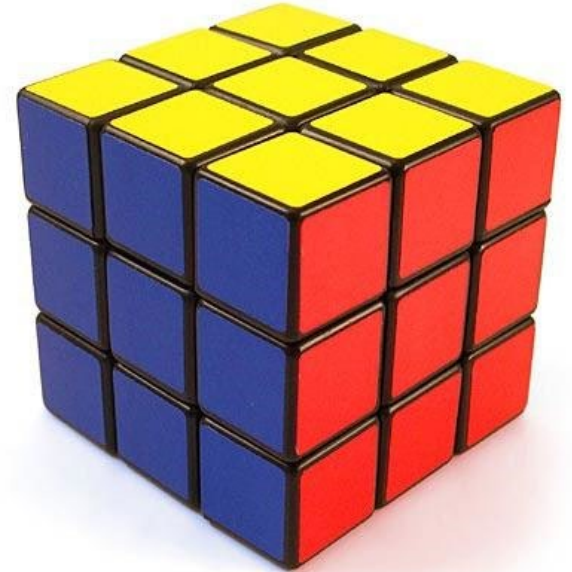
- Learning doesn't stop after retirement—older adults continue building **crystallized intelligence**
- **Hobbies** can improve mood, create meaning, and strengthen relationships

# Cognitive stimulation - The art of a challenge

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## Use different areas of the brain

- Learning new skills
- Lifelong learning opportunities
- Abstract thinking and problem-solving through creative hobbies ( art, writing, or gardening)
- Using multiple senses



# Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST)

## Evidence-Based Approach for Mild-Moderate Dementia

- Combines meaningful activities, social interaction, and cognitive stimulation to improve quality of life.
- **Session Format:** 1-hour, theme-based sessions  
Delivered either in-person or virtually in a group format or 1:1
- **Facilitators:** Anyone with experience working with people living with dementia (PLWD) – professionals, paraprofessionals, or family care partners
- **Settings:** Homes, care communities, day centers, or virtually

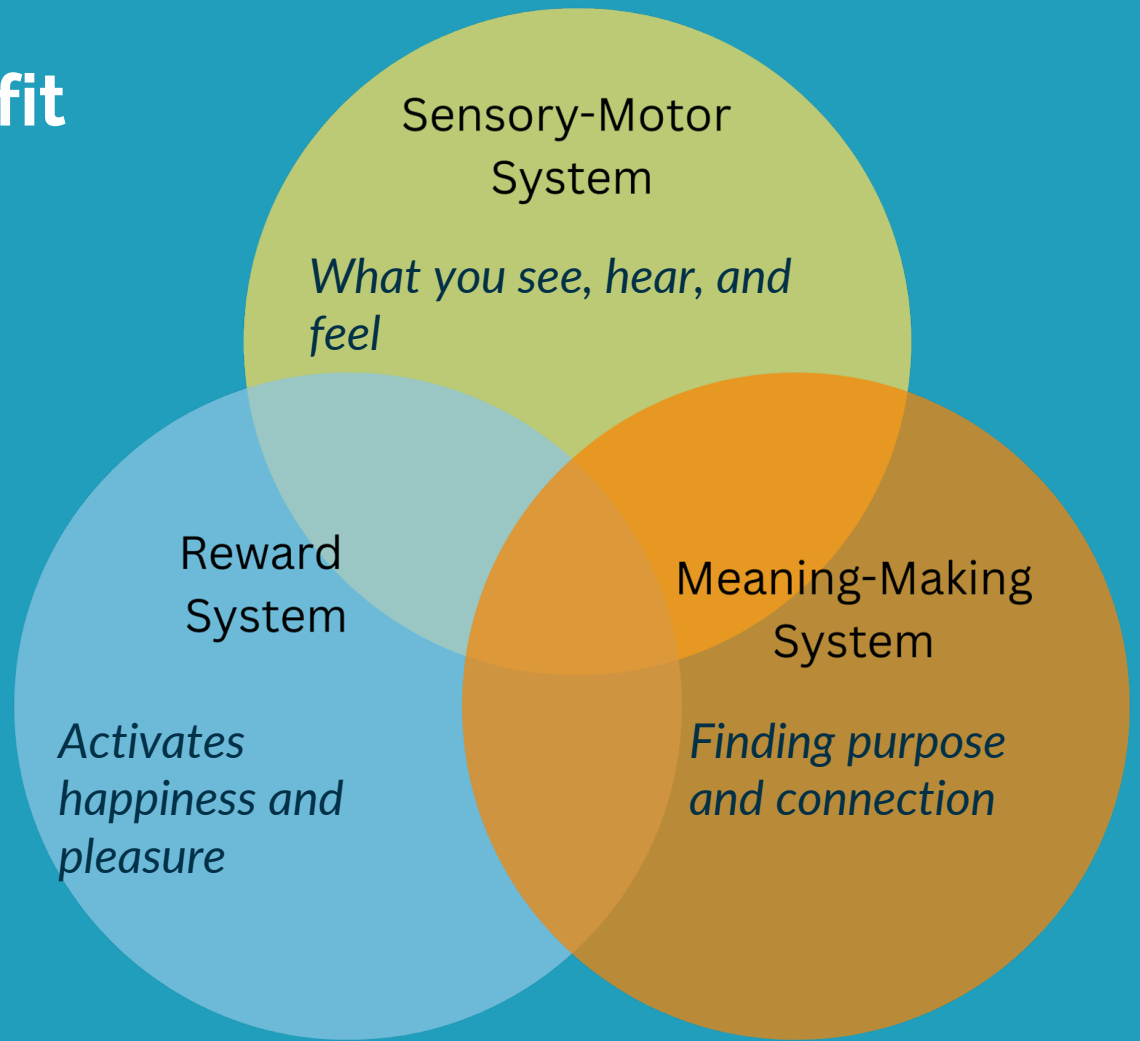


# How does art benefit your brain?

Engaging with art activates the “aesthetic triad”.

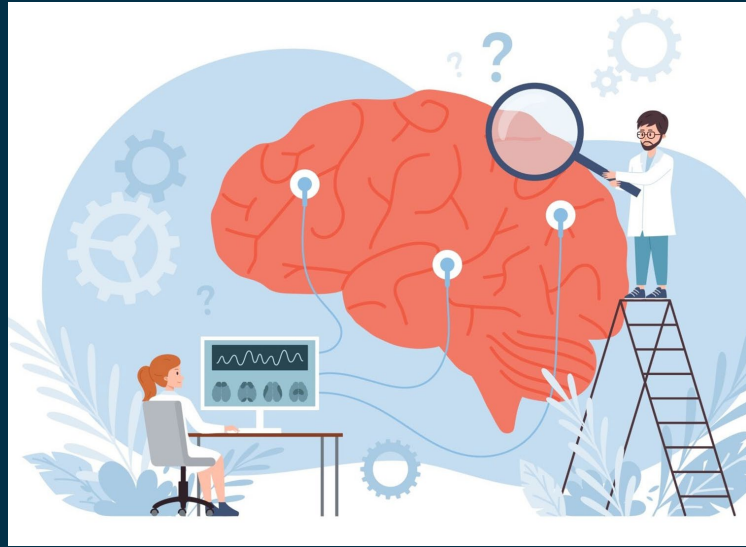
These brain systems working together create an aesthetic experience, which supports cognitive health.

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# The point?



**We have the power to reduce our own likelihood of dementia, improve mental well-being, and promote cognitive health!**

# Q & A

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*Testimonial: "I have a deep belief in Memory Keepers. It's a gem of a program for people who are losing their way. It draws them back."*