

## Engage in healthy lifestyle habits to maintain a healthy brain

The brain needs exercise just like other parts of your body; the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets. Engaging in lifestyle habits right NOW that promote physical health and healthy blood flow to the brain are so important to maintaining the health of your brain throughout your life.

Researchers are frantically working to find a cure for age related memory loss, including Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. The exact cause of Alzheimer's isn't known but the hope is to find better treatment options and ways to prevent the disease entirely.

Until that cure is found we CAN do something to either prevent or minimize the effect that memory loss has on our lives. Research indicates that by adopting a healthy lifestyle it will not only help us have a healthy brain, but it may also help lower our risk of heart disease and diabetes as well. This is good news for those of us who want to live a healthy, active life as we continue to age! Here are some tips:

**Eat wisely** – Experts suggest that high cholesterol may contribute to strokes and brain cell damage. A low fat, low-cholesterol diet is advisable. There is growing evidence that a diet rich in dark vegetables and fruits such as berries, spinach, and broccoli, which contain antioxidants, may help protect brain cells. Adding salmon and tuna that are high in omega-3 fatty acids is important. Other things that are good for your heart and your brain are green tea, dark chocolate and red wine (in small amounts). Drinking plenty of water is actually food for the brain and is important so that toxins can be eliminated from your body.

**Stay physically active** – Physical exercise helps maintain good blood flow to the brain and alters chemicals that actually help protect it. Just 30 minutes a day of aerobic exercise can help slow down memory loss and improve mental function. Researchers from Sweden found those in middle age who began exercising at least twice a week, were 60% less likely to develop dementia.

**Challenge your mind daily.** Just as you lose strength and flexibility in your body if you neglect physical exercise the same thing happens to your brain if you don't use it. Challenge yourself by taking a class in something you've always been curious about or take up a new sport or learn to play an instrument. Doing different things than you are accustomed to doing is important to generate new brain cells and keep your mind sharp.

“People who choose activities that stimulate their minds throughout their lives are less likely to develop dementia, or memory loss”, says Robert Wilson, a neuropsychologist at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. “There's little evidence that one type of cerebral exercise is better than another”, he says. “If I was going to bet on anything, I would bet on reading,” says Wilson. “The key is to pick something you enjoy doing and can sustain over a long period of time.”

The old adage “Use it or Lose it” means by doing something **right now** to become more active, mentally and physically, we can help keep our brains healthy and strong for our entire lives.

Thelma's Place located at 352 NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. in Canby is a resource center for people experiencing memory loss. For info on monthly Community Education, support groups and Minders Keepers Day Center call Mary at 503-502-4509 or visit [www.thelmasplace.org](http://www.thelmasplace.org). Country Side Living provides a home for residents with Alzheimer's or other dementia. Visit [www.countrysideliving.com](http://www.countrysideliving.com).