

The Doctor Will See You Now (cont.)

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example, take a class at a local college, community center or online.

3. Butt out

Evidence shows that smoking increases risk of cognitive decline. Quitting smoking can reduce that risk to levels comparable to those who have not smoked.

4. Follow your heart

Evidence shows that risk factors for cardiovascular disease and stroke — obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes — negatively impact your cognitive health. Take care of your heart, and your brain just might follow.

5. Heads up!

Brain injury can raise your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Wear a seat belt, use a helmet when playing contact sports or riding a bike, and take steps to prevent falls.

6. Fuel up right

Eat a healthy and balanced diet

that is lower in fat and higher in vegetables and fruit to help reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Although research on diet and cognitive function is limited, certain diets, including Mediterranean and Mediterranean-DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), may contribute to risk reduction.

7. Catch some Zzz's

Not getting enough sleep due to conditions like insomnia or sleep apnea may result in problems with memory and thinking.

8. Take care of your mental health

Some studies link a history of depression with increased risk of cognitive decline, so seek medical treatment if you have symptoms of depression, anxiety or other mental health concerns. Also, try to manage stress.

9. Buddy up

Staying socially engaged may support brain health. Pursue social activities that are meaningful to you. Find ways to be part of your local

community — if you love animals, consider volunteering at a local shelter. If you enjoy singing, join a local choir or help at an after-school program. Or, just share activities with friends and family.

10. Stump yourself

Challenge and activate your mind. Build a piece of furniture. Complete a jigsaw puzzle. Do something artistic. Play games, such as bridge, that make you think strategically. Challenging your mind may have short and long-term benefits for your brain.

While scientists do not know everything about the disease and are still conducting research, the current understanding is that there is not one cause; instead, there may be several contributing factors to its development. In addition to age, these could include family history/genetics, diet, education, and environment.

In addition to memory loss, other common signs of Alzheimer's onset are difficulty performing familiar

tasks; decreased or poor judgement; repeating questions or getting lost going to familiar places; changes in mood, personality or behavior; and misplacing or losing things and unable to trace steps to find them.

Although these are common signs of early dementia, they don't necessarily mean the person has Alzheimer's disease.

If you are concerned about yourself or a loved one, it's important to talk with a health care provider who can help determine if you/the person is experiencing Alzheimer's disease or something that is more treatable, such as a vitamin deficiency or a side effect from a medication. Early and accurate diagnosis also provides opportunities for you and your family to consider financial planning, develop advance directives, enroll in clinical trials, and anticipate care needs.

For more info: Visit the Alzheimer's Association website, <https://www.alz.org/newmexico>.



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