

# Strengthen Your Mind, Strengthen Your Life

### How to protect, fuel and elevate your brain at every age

Your brain is your command center. It shapes your memory, mood, focus, creativity and decision-making. Yet brain health is often overlooked until challenges arise. This toolkit breaks down what brain health really means, its connection to dementia, why it matters, and how everyday habits – from sleep to social connection – can boost cognitive performance and long-term resilience.

## What is brain health?

Brain health refers to how effectively your brain functions across four interconnected areas: cognitive skills like memory, focus and problem-solving; emotional regulation and stress response; motor abilities such as movement and coordination; and social capacities including communication, connection and empathy. When these systems work well, you're able to think clearly, manage stress, adapt to challenges and stay engaged with the world around you. Brain health isn't only about preventing disease – it's about optimizing how you feel and function every single day.



## Brain health and dementia

Brain health and dementia are deeply connected. Dementia isn't a single disease – it's an umbrella term for symptoms that affect memory, thinking and daily functioning. Conditions like Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia and frontotemporal dementia are among the most common causes. Dementia occurs when brain cells are damaged and can no longer communicate effectively, leading to challenges with reasoning, problem-solving, emotional regulation and, in some cases, personality.

Early signs of dementia often include difficulty remembering recent events, repeating questions, getting lost or struggling with familiar tasks. Because early detection can help individuals and families plan, adapt and access support, it's important to talk with a health care provider if these symptoms appear. Even though dementia cannot always be prevented, nurturing your brain today supports clearer thinking, better mood and healthier aging tomorrow.

## Boosting brain performance: Key areas to focus on

The good news: Our brain health can be improved with small, consistent changes.

The following practical strategies can help you build habits that protect and enhance cognitive function.



### 1. Challenges for brain health

Mental challenges help keep your brain sharp, flexible and resilient. When you engage in activities that stretch your thinking, you strengthen your brain pathways related to memory, focus, creativity and problem-solving. These challenges don't need to be complicated – small, consistent exercises can make a meaningful difference in cognitive health.

#### How to support mental performance:

- Try puzzles, riddles or strategy games to strengthen problem-solving.
- Practice memory exercises, such as recalling lists or learning short passages.
- Learn a new skill – like a language, craft or hobby – to build new neural pathways.
- Use creative prompts such as drawing, writing or brainstorming to spark imagination.
- Incorporate focus-based tasks like timed concentration sessions or mindfulness.
- Make small daily shifts – take a new route, cook from memory or switch hands for simple tasks.

## 2. Hearing health

Hearing and brain function are deeply connected. When hearing declines, the brain must work harder to interpret sound, leaving fewer resources for memory and thinking.

### How to support hearing health:

- Get regular hearing screenings.
- Reduce prolonged exposure to loud noise.
- Use ear protection at concerts, during yardwork or in loud workplaces.
- Treat hearing loss early – hearing aids reduce cognitive strain.
- Keep earbuds at 60% volume or lower.



## 3. Blood pressure

High blood pressure is one of the strongest predictors of cognitive decline. It damages blood vessels, which supply oxygen and nutrients to the brain.

### Brain-friendly habits:

- Reduce intake of sodium and ultra-processed foods.
- Increase intake of potassium-rich foods (bananas, spinach, beans).
- Stay active most days.
- Manage stress through breathing, stretching or mindfulness.
- Monitor blood pressure regularly.



## 4. Fitness

Movement is one of the most powerful tools for brain health. Exercise increases blood flow, supports memory and stimulates growth of new brain cells.

### Aim for:

- 150 minutes of moderate activity per week.
- Strength training two to three times per week.
- Short movement breaks during long sitting periods.

### Brain-boosting activities:

- Brisk walking.
- Dancing.
- Yoga or tai chi.
- Cycling.
- Resistance training.





## 5. Diet

Your brain uses 20% of your daily energy. What you eat directly affects your mood, memory and long-term cognitive health.

### Brain-supportive foods:

- Leafy greens.
- Berries.
- Fatty fish (salmon, sardines).
- Nuts and seeds.
- Whole grains.
- Olive oil.
- Beans and legumes.

### Tips:

- Limit intake of added sugar.
- Reduce intake of fried and ultraprocessed foods.
- Stay hydrated – dehydration impacts focus and mood.

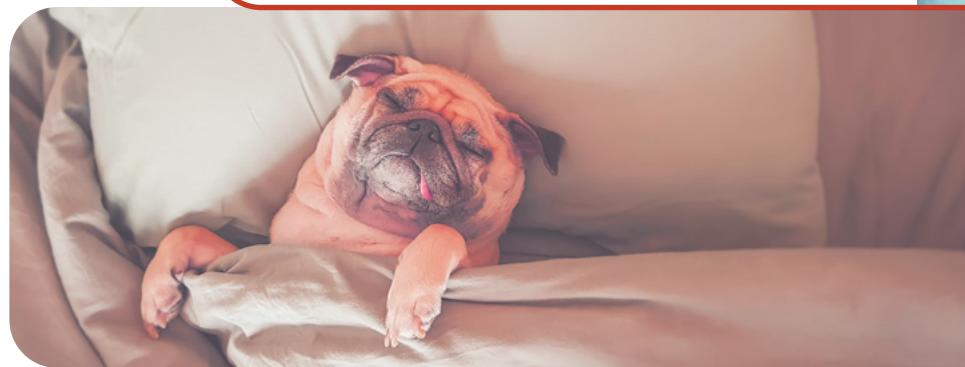


## 6. Sleep

Sleep is when your brain repairs itself, organizes its memories and clears waste. Poor sleep affects attention, emotional regulation and problem-solving.

### Sleep-supporting habits:

- Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- Keep a consistent sleep schedule.
- Limit exposure to screens starting an hour before bed.
- Create a cool, dark and quiet sleep environment.
- Avoid heavy meals and caffeine late in the day.



## 7. Alcohol and smoking

Both alcohol and nicotine impact brain structure and function over time.

### Alcohol:

- Moderate intake is key.
- Heavy drinking affects memory, mood and sleep.
- Try having alcohol-free days each week.

### Smoking:

- Reduces oxygen to the brain.
- Increases risk of stroke and cognitive decline.
- Quitting improves brain health at any age.

## 8. Social connection

Social interaction is one of the strongest predictors of long-term brain health. Connection stimulates cognitive processes, reduces stress and protects against depression.

### Ways to build social wellness:

- Join a club, class or community group.
- Schedule regular check-ins with friends or family.
- Volunteer or participate in Thrive programs.
- Combine social time with movement (walks, group fitness, game nights).



## Why brain health matters

A strong, well-supported brain enhances nearly every aspect of your life. It sharpens decision-making, strengthens emotional balance, and improves your ability to learn, recall information and stay productive. Maintaining brain health also reduces the risk of cognitive decline, boosts resilience during stressful periods, and fuels creativity and problem-solving. Because brain health evolves throughout your lifetime, it's never too early – or too late – to start building habits that support long-term cognitive strength and wellbeing.

## Brain health quick-start checklist

Use this list to build your personal brain-boosting routine:

- Learn a new skill.
- Move your body for at least 20 minutes today.
- Eat one brain-friendly food (berries, greens, nuts, fish).
- Drink enough water to stay hydrated.
- Take a five-minute stress-relief break.
- Connect with someone you care about.
- Limit alcohol and avoid smoking.
- Protect your hearing.
- Aim for a consistent bedtime.

