Healthy Aging & Your Brain

Nusha Askari, PhD
Stanford University School of Medicine, Department of Neurology
Stanford Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center
Aging and Health

Aging well depends on your:

- Genes
- Environment
- Lifestyle

Today we will discuss lifestyle choices YOU can make to help maintain a healthy body and brain.
Age-Related Changes in Memory & Learning

What are some changes we can expect as we grow older?

You may find:

- Increased difficulty finding words
- More problems multi-tasking
- Harder to focus & to pay attention
Age-Related Changes in Memory & Learning

Despite these memory changes, you can still:

- Learn new things
- Create new memories
- Improve vocabulary and language skills
Dementia is **NOT** a normal age-related change

Dementia is a general (umbrella) term.

- Alzheimer’s Disease
- Mixed Dementia
- Frontotemporal Dementia
- Vascular Dementia
- Parkinson’s Disease
- Lewy Body Dementia
Alzheimer’s Disease

For more detailed information, go to www.alz.org

- The national website of the Alzheimer’s Association
- Continually updated with new information and resources
- Contains an informative “tour of the brain”
Alzheimer’s Disease

Known non-modifiable risks for Alzheimer’s Disease:

- Age itself: the biggest risk factor! 1 in 3 persons age 85+ has some form of dementia
- Immediate family history of someone with AD
- Genes, in some people, especially early onset AD
  - Not a major risk for most people
Alzheimer’s Disease

Modifiable risks for Alzheimer’s Disease:

- Heart disease and other insults to the cardiovascular system
- High blood pressure at mid-life that remains poorly controlled into old age
- Lack of physical & mental activity
Alzheimer’s Disease in the Media

How can you maintain a healthy brain?
First, we need to look at risks to your brain’s health.
Possible Threats To Brain Health

- Some medicines, or improper use of them
- **Smoking** – it’s bad for just about everything!
- Heart disease, diabetes, and other health problems
- Poor diet, too much alcohol
- Insufficient sleep
- Lack of physical activity
- Little social activity and isolation
Brain Injury from Falling

- Older adults are at higher risk for falls and other accidents that can cause brain injury (TBI)
- Brain injury in older adults commonly results from falls
- **AVOID** brain injury from falling!

So, how can you reduce your fall risk?
Reducing Frequency of Falls

How can you reduce your risk?

- Exercise to improve balance & coordination
- Take a fall prevention class
  - Stanford has a free program to assess risk in the home
- Make your home safer
- Review medicines and vision with your doctor
- Wear safety belts and helmets
- Get enough sleep!
Depression Affects Brain Function

- Feelings of sadness or loss of interest in favorite activities that last for weeks at a time
- Problems with sleeping or eating too much or too little
- Feelings of loneliness, discouragement
- Negative attitude about the future
- Not a normal part of aging
Depression Affects Brain Function

- Some medicines can cause depression
- Confusion or attention problems caused by depression can sometimes look like dementia
- Depression can be treated with appropriate medication and/or psychological counseling
  - Cognitive/Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
Sleep Apnea & Other Sleep Problems

- Short pauses in breathing while sleeping – not enough oxygen to the brain
- Can lead to injury, high blood pressure, stroke, or memory loss, all of which can affect brain health
- Treatment focuses on lifestyle changes
  - Avoiding alcohol
  - Losing weight
  - Devices ordered by your doctor (C-PAP)
5 actions that are likely to help your brain health:

- Take care of your physical health
- Eat healthy foods (MIND diet)
- Be active
- Learn new things – USE your brain!
- Socialize – stay connected with family, friends, and community

Each of these points will be discussed in more detail
Take Care Of Your Health

- Get recommended health screenings annually
- Know your numbers!
  - Blood pressure
  - Cholesterol
  - Blood sugar
  - Any others unique to you!

"You know, if I do give you a heart, you’ll have to start watching your cholesterol."
Take Care Of Your Health

- Actively manage health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol
- Consult with your health care provider to make sure your medicines are right for you
- Reduce risk for brain injuries due to falls and other types of accidents
- Quit smoking!
Physical activity may:

- Reduce risks of diabetes, heart disease, depression, and stroke
- Prevent falls
- Stimulate blood flow in the brain
- Improve connections among brain cells!
Be Active... Get Moving!

- Get at least 150 mins of exercise each week
- Move about 30 minutes on most days
  - Walking is a good start – as long as you get your heart rate up!

“Every morning I think about going for a long walk. At least my brain is getting some exercise!”
Be Active... Get Moving!

- Join programs that can help you learn to move safely
  - Many programs are offered at senior centers, the Y, etc.
- Also necessary:
  - STRENGTH TRAINING, BALANCE TRAINING, and STRETCHING!
- Check with your health care provider FIRST if you haven’t been active and want to start an exercise program
The MIND Diet

➢ Stands for “Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay”

The MIND Diet – 10 Foods to Eat

1. Green leafy vegetables: one salad daily
2. Other vegetables: one serving daily
3. Nuts: one serving daily
4. Berries: 2+ servings a week, blueberries & strawberries preferred
5. Beans: 3-4 servings per week
6. Whole grains: three servings daily
7. Fish: one or more servings per week
8. Poultry: at least two servings per week
9. Olive oil: This should be your primary oil
10. Wine or purple grape juice: one 5oz glass per day
5 Foods to Avoid

1. Red meats: eat rarely
2. Butter: eat no more than a tablespoon a day
   Never eat margarine
3. Cheese: one serving or less per week
4. Pastries and sweets: Avoid all
5. Fried or fast food: Less than one serving per week
Keep Your Mind Active

- Do mentally stimulating activities
- Read books and magazines
- Play games
- Learn new things
- Take or teach a class
- Be social through work or volunteering

Clinical trials have not proven that these types of activities will prevent Alzheimer’s Disease, but they are fun & very likely to help us “maintain our brain”
Stay Connected

- People who do meaningful activities, like volunteering, say they feel happier and healthier.
- Social activities are linked to reduced risk for some health problems, including dementia.
- Join in social and other programs through your senior center or other community organizations.
Summary

From an article by Frank Longo, MD, PhD, Chief of Stanford Department of Neurology & Co-director of ADRC – “Can we prevent or effectively treat Alzheimer’s disease?”
After a thorough review of the literature, he concludes:

- Studies continue to point to the powerful effects of **daily exercise**
- Studies also show benefits of maintaining **appropriate weight**, consuming a **healthy diet**, and remaining **cognitively engaged with life**
- Most likely someone who does **all** of these will have the best outcomes!
What Can You Do Today?

Pick one thing you can do to help your brain!

- Take small first steps! Examples:
  - Take a 10-minute walk a few times every day
  - Add 2-4 servings of vegetables & fruits each day
  - Make an appt for health screenings or a physical exam

- Write down what you will do and when: make a commitment to do all that you can do

- Get support from family, friends, or community groups!
The Stanford Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center (ADRC) does research on different types of diseases that affect memory.

- The data we collect will help us learn how to prevent future generations from having these same problems.
We offer research opportunities for...

- People with no or minor cognitive problems
- People in the early stages of dementia
- People with Parkinson’s disease
- People who are concerned about memory

We have a particular interest in Latino & American Indian families who have been under-represented in dementia research for decades. We welcome everyone who is eligible.
Benefits to Participating in Stanford ADRC

- Availability of exercise and wellness classes (Yoga, Tai Chi, Dance, Qi Gong) at no cost.*
- Availability of support services (caregiver workshops, support groups, classes) at no cost.*
- Travel reimbursement, participation incentives, and feedback to share with your family and health care providers.

*In collaboration with the Stanford Neuroscience Supportive Care Program and Stanford Aging Adult Services
Interested in learning more about or volunteering for our research?

- Call our Clinical Nurse Coordinator,
- Christina Wyss-Coray, at (650) 721-2409

Questions about this presentation?

Contact Dr. Nusha Askari at:

askarin@stanford.edu