How To boost your brain health

Surveys of adult "baby boomers" consistently find that memory loss is a top concern, and Alzheimer's disease is their most feared disabling disease.

Adopting a brain healthy lifestyle can not only help keep your brain healthier as you age but also protect you from chronic illnesses. To protect your brain, follow these recommendations.

Stay Physically Active

Exercise helps maintain good blood flow to the brain, encourages the growth of new brain cells and can significantly reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes, which are all conditions that put you at higher risk for developing Alzheimer's and other dementias. Just 30 minutes a day will get the body moving and the heart pumping.

Adopt a Brain Healthy Diet

Like the heart, the brain needs the right balance of nutrients to function well. A brain-healthy diet reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes, encourages good blood flow to the brain, and is low in fat and cholesterol.

Stay Socially Active

Research shows that people who are regularly engaged in social interaction maintain their brain vitality. Stay active in the workplace, have lunch with friends, go

Staying regularly engaged in social interaction, pursuing new interests and playing challenging mind games are recommended steps for adopting a brain-healthy lifestyle.

to church, volunteer in community groups and join social groups.

Stay Mentally Active

Mental decline as you age may be due to altered connections among brain cells. But research has found that keeping the brain active seems to increase its vitality and may build its reserves of brain cells and connections.

"The best way to stay mentally active is to cross train your brain by engaging in a variety of brain stimulating activities on a regular basis with increasing levels of challenge," says Karen Briskie, Director of the Medical Team's Journey Behavioral Health Program. Here are some tips:

• Commit to lifelong learning: read a book and discuss it with a friend;
• Play games to challenge your mind: chess, jigsaw puzzles, cards;
• Pursue a new interest: learn to play a musical instrument;
• Break your routine: walk on a different

route or change the order of your morning routine;
• Involve one or more of your senses in a novel way: use your non-dominant hand to perform daily tasks such as brushing your teeth;
• Play stimulating video games like Tetris, which has been shown to improve efficiency in parts of the brain associated with reasoning, critical thinking, language, and processing;
• Keep up hobbies such as scrapbooking, knitting, and gardening.

"If you have concerns about memory loss, thinking skills and behavior changes, consult your doctor since an early diagnosis can have many advantages," says Briskie. No treatment can stop Alzheimer's, but there are drugs that can relieve symptoms in the early and middle stages of the disease and help control behavioral symptoms. There are also programs, like THE MEDICAL TEAM's Journey Behavioral Home Health Program, which can help patients with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's by educating patients and caregivers in areas such as safety, medications, communication techniques, coping strategies and provides assistance with activities of daily living.

Sources: *THE MEDICAL TEAM Aging and Memory Loss Wellness Program, Understanding Alzheimer's Disease Health Sense from THE MEDICAL TEAM, Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org), and Ask Dr. Sears (www.askdrsears.com).*