

## Give up smoking and drink in moderation

Smoking and heavy drinking are two of the most preventable risk factors for Alzheimer's disease. Not only does smoking increase the odds for those over 65 by nearly 79 percent, researchers at Miami's Mt. Sinai Medical Center warn that a combination of these two behaviors reduces the age of Alzheimer's onset by six to seven years.

When you stop smoking, the brain benefits from improved circulation almost immediately, no matter your age. However, brain changes from alcohol abuse can only be reversed in their early stages.

### What about supplements?

Folic acid, vitamin B12, vitamin D, magnesium, and fish oil are believed to preserve and improve brain health. Studies of vitamin E, ginkgo biloba, coenzyme Q10, and turmeric have yielded less conclusive results, but may also be beneficial in the prevention or delay of Alzheimer's and dementia symptoms.

Talk to your doctor about medication interactions, and review current literature to make a personal decision about the costs and benefits of dietary supplements.

## Alzheimer's & dementia prevention pillar #3: Mental stimulation

Those who continue learning new things throughout life and challenging their brains are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and dementia, so make it a point to stay mentally active. In essence, you need to "use it or lose it."

Activities involving multiple tasks or requiring communication, interaction, and organization offer the greatest protection. Set aside time each day to stimulate your brain. Cross-training with these brain-boosting activities will help keep you mentally sharp:

- **Learn something new.** Study a foreign language, learn sign language, practice a musical instrument, read the newspaper or a good book, or take up a new hobby. The greater the novelty and challenge, the larger the deposit in your brain reserves.
- **Practice memorization.** Start with something short, progressing to something a little more involved, such as the 50 U.S. state capitals. Create rhymes and patterns to strengthen your memory connections.
- **Enjoy strategy games, puzzles, and riddles.** Brain teasers and strategy games provide a great mental workout and build your capacity to form and retain cognitive associations. Do a crossword puzzle, play board games or cards, or work word and number games, such as Scrabble or Sudoku.

- **Practice the 5 W's.** Observe and report like a crime detective. Keep a "Who, What, Where, When, and Why" list of your daily experiences. Capturing visual details keeps your neurons firing.
- **Follow the road less traveled.** Take a new route, eat with your non-dominant hand, rearrange your computer file system. Vary your habits regularly to create new brain pathways.

### Alzheimer's & dementia prevention pillar #4: Quality sleep

Your brain needs regular, restful sleep in order to function at optimum capacity. Sleep deprivation not only leaves you cranky and tired, but impairs your ability to think, problem-solve, and process, store, and recall information. Deep, dreamy sleep is critical for memory formation and retention. If nightly sleep deprivation is slowing your thinking and affecting your mood, you may be at greater risk of developing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. The vast majority of adults need at least 8 hours of sleep per night. Any less, and productivity and creativity suffers.

#### Tips to help you combat insomnia and catch up on your Z's

- **Establish a regular sleep schedule.** Going to bed and getting up at the same time reinforces your natural circadian rhythms. Your brain's clock responds to regularity.
- **Be smart about napping.** While taking a nap can be a great way to recharge, especially for older adults, it can make insomnia worse. If insomnia is a problem for you, consider eliminating napping. If you must nap, do it in the early afternoon, and limit it to thirty minutes.
- **Set the mood.** Reserve your bed for sleep and sex, and ban television and computers from the bedroom (both are stimulating and may lead to difficulties falling asleep).
- **Create a relaxing bedtime ritual.** Take a hot bath, do some light stretches, write in your journal, or dim the lights. As it becomes habit, your nightly ritual will send a powerful signal to your brain that it's time for deep restorative sleep.
- **Quiet your inner chatter.** When stress, anxiety, or negative internal dialogues keep you awake, get out of bed. Try reading or relaxing in another room for twenty minutes then hop back in.