

# Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

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## Be Mindful of Mental Well-Being

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Older adulthood is a special time in life. It's a time to enjoy friends and family, be active and engage in leisure activities, learn new things, and to share words of wisdom gathered over the years. You might be surprised to know that enjoying older adulthood in all these ways can help to keep your brain healthy. Keeping your brain at its best can often translate into many years of a full, active life, and greater independence.

While we all want to prevent diseases that affect the brain, such as Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, brain health also includes feeling good about ourselves and staying socially active. Read on to find out about simple ways to maintain a healthy brain.

While the school days may be long past for many older people, you're never too old to learn new things. In fact, staying mentally active may help to slow cognitive decline. Try new activities



that challenge your brain; putting together a puzzle, playing a new game, reading a book with grandchildren, and attending lessons at senior centers or a local community school can all provide mental stimulation.

Keeping your brain healthy can also be as easy and fun as spending time with friends and family.



Being socially active is mentally stimulating and helps to prevent loneliness. Try to stay connected with people in your community by volunteering at your local senior center or church, joining a club, or taking a class that interests you at a local community school. Walking or taking an exercise class with friends is also a great way to build both relationships, and a strong heart and muscles!

Another important part of living and aging well is being positive. Having an optimistic outlook can help to improve mood and boost self-esteem.

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When we focus on the positive aspects of life, we're better at coping with difficult situations and can feel more in control. Remember that you are special and that everyone has unique abilities and strengths to contribute. Make a habit of focusing on the positive aspects of yourself and situations, and encourage those around you to do the same. Make your environment a bright and positive one; smiles are often contagious!



As with other organs in our body, healthy lifestyle habits help our brain to function at its best. Being physically active and eating healthy are two important ways to protect both physical and mental well-being. Activities such as brisk walking, gardening, bicycling, dancing, resistance exercises, and stretching can help us to stay active and can help to boost mood, fight depression, improve blood flow to the brain, and give us a sense of accomplishment. Some clubs in the community are centered around special activities, such as hiking and bowling. Being physically active with a group can often make it even more fun and can help to build close relationships.

A healthy eating pattern that emphasizes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean sources of protein such as fish, and low-fat milk products is important for keeping our bodies and minds active and healthy, too. These foods can help us to obtain important nutrients, as well as to maintain a healthy body weight and to control high cholesterol and blood pressure levels, which are associated with increased risk for mental illnesses, such as Alzheimer's disease. Sharing healthy foods with friends and family can also be a positive social time. Try joining a cooking class or recipe club, or cook with your grandchildren to make meal and snack times more enjoyable.

While many of us worry about illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease with age, the good news is that a healthy lifestyle can help to keep our brains healthy. Mental and physical activity and a healthy diet can all contribute to a long and healthy life.

**For more information, including how to cope with mental illnesses, and understanding depression and brain functioning, see:**

AARP Brain Health at:

<http://www.aarp.org/health/brain/>.

The Alzheimer's Association at:

[http://www.alz.org/we\\_can\\_help\\_brain\\_health\\_maintain\\_your\\_brain.asp](http://www.alz.org/we_can_help_brain_health_maintain_your_brain.asp).