

# Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!



November 2009 Newsletter

## Keeping Your Mind Healthy

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Staying healthy is important in all of life's stages. Making healthy food choices, being active regularly, and staying involved with friends and family can help keep you healthy as well as make life more enjoyable. In older adulthood, it becomes increasingly important to maintain brain health. A healthy mind can help prevent accidents and falls, illnesses, and diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease. November is Alzheimer's Awareness Month, so this newsletter brings you a bundle of ways to keep your mind healthy.

Alzheimer's disease interferes with your brain signals, causing your brain and body to act differently than it should. Often, Alzheimer's disease damages the areas of your brain that allow you to read, say, hear and think about words. Other areas may be affected as well, especially as Alzheimer's disease progresses.

Read on for simple ways to prevent or slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease while having fun as well!

**Learn new things.** Often, as people age, their minds are less stimulated than when they were young and still learning new things. Although it may be scary to try new things such as fancy computers, new recipes, self-checkout machines at the grocery store, or new puzzles like Sudoku's, doing so can help keep your brain working properly. The more you use your brain, the better it works. Learning new things has even more benefits than maintaining brain health; it can make life fun and a little easier, too! Often, local community centers offer programs and activities that can also help stimulate your mind. So, the next time you are faced with something new or unknown, remind yourself that working your brain is healthy and has other benefits as well.

**Be social.** Spending time with friends and family, going on walks with neighbors, joining in activities at



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churches or local community centers, volunteering at hospitals or car drives, and grabbing lunch with a friend can all help keep your mind active, especially the parts of your brain involved with language. Also, building relationships with friends and family makes life more enjoyable. For example, sharing memories, jokes, or pictures almost always makes us smile or laugh. Staying happy is one key to a healthy mind.

**Keep a healthy body weight.** Typically, people who are overweight are more likely to develop dementias, or forgetfulness. To keep a healthy body weight, eat mainly healthy foods and keep unhealthy foods to a minimum. Also, try not to eat until you feel full. If you eat until you are no longer hungry and then stop, you will likely be satisfied or full within 20 minutes after eating. If you are still hungry after 20 minutes, then you may not have eaten enough. To make it easier and more fun, recruit friends and family to try these things with you.

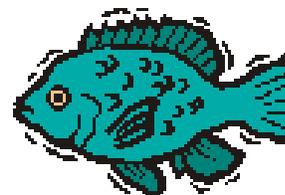
**Get regular activity.** Your brain needs nutrients constantly, and your body delivers these nutrients to the brain by



carrying them in your bloodstream. Regular activity promotes good blood flow and helps make sure your brain is getting the nourishment it needs. Without proper nutrition, your brain cannot send signals to your body when it needs to. In this way, not being active can actually worsen the effects of Alzheimer's! Being active also helps maintain strong bones and muscles, keep a healthy body weight, ward off depression, improve mood, and give a sense of accomplishment. **To stay active, try some of the following fun activities with a friend or family member:** dancing to your favorite music, gardening, stretching while watching TV or listening to music, walking around the neighborhood or a local shopping mall or park, attending yoga or exercise classes, washing your car, and cooking dinner with neighbors or family. Although you can be active alone, it is more fun to do activities with another person or in groups. Check out clubs and community centers where you live to see what they have to offer in terms of physical and social activities. You may even make some new friends in the process!

**Eat healthy.** Knowing how to eat healthy can be tough with so many

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unhealthy foods around us. However, healthy foods can easily be found if you know what to look for. A healthy meal pattern that includes foods such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and lean meat, fish and other protein sources, will help your body defend against disease and illness. These foods have the nutrients your body and mind need on a daily basis, so it is important to eat some of all these foods everyday. For tips on how to include these foods in your diet and how much of each of these foods you need each day, talk to your dietitian or healthcare provider, or visit the USDA MyPyramid website.

Foods that help control high blood pressure, cholesterol, and body weight can also help prevent Alzheimer's or other mental illnesses. Try eating less saturated and Trans fats (fats that are solid at room temperature – ex. butter, Crisco), and eat more mono- and poly-unsaturated fats (in olive and canola oils, nuts, and fatty fish such as salmon, halibut, trout, and tuna). In addition to eating healthy, you may also need a multi-vitamin or mineral supplement. Talk to your dietitian or other healthcare provider to find out if you are getting all the nutrients you need from your diet.

Although there are some things in life we cannot control, there are several things we can control. Staying mentally and physically active, spending time with loved ones, and eating healthy are all choices we can make each day. Now that you know more about preventing conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, take control of your choices and keep your mind healthy!

**For more information on how to cope with mental illnesses & understand depression & brain functioning, visit these two websites:**

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).

**For more information on eating healthy, visit the USDA MyPyramid website at:**  
<http://www.mypyramid.gov/>

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