

# Live Healthy Georgia- Seniors Taking Charge!

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## Mental Wellness and Aging

In order to savor your later years, maintaining mental wellness is an essential part of life, both for you and for those around you. Usually people think of staying fit from the neck down, but the health of your brain plays a critical role in almost everything you do: thinking, feeling, remembering, working, playing, and sleeping. Just like the rest of our bodies, our brains change as we age. So, it is important to make healthy food choices, exercise, and interact with family and friends on a regular basis. Engaging in these activities will help you maintain good mental health and ward off diseases such as Alzheimer's and other dementias.

### Adopt a Brain Healthy Diet

Your brain functions at its best when you are following a healthful eating plan everyday. Eating a diet composed of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, fish, and low-fat dairy will

provide your body with the nutrients it needs to defend itself against diseases. Dark skinned fruits and vegetables, and fish are beneficial for your brain



because they contain antioxidants which are substances that protect your brain cells from damage. When you consume a diet full of these healthy foods that is low in fat and cholesterol, you can be sure to keep your mind strong and healthy. Try cooking with family and friends, having neighbors over for dinner, or making healthy snacks with your grandkids for a fun, social activity.

### Stay Physically Active

Aerobic exercise increases your oxygen consumption helping to reduce brain cell loss and improve cognition. Activities such as dancing, yoga, gardening, housework, mowing the lawn, walking, and stretching help you maintain strong bones and muscles, improve your mood and increase the blood flow to your brain. Regular physical activity can also help you manage your body weight and prevent obesity which is associated with the increased risk for mental illnesses such as dementia. Physical activity can also be a way for you to socialize with others in your community. Check out the group activities at the local community center or senior center, or ask a neighbor to take a walk or help



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you in your garden. Getting involved in these activities with others will make it a more enjoyable experience.

## Stay Mentally Active

Committing to life-long learning is an important step in preventing cognitive decline. It may seem like your days of learning are over, but incorporating mentally stimulating activities into your daily routine can be fun and give your brain a little exercise. Jigsaw puzzles, riddles, word searches, sudoku, reading, writing, and playing games are all activities that can stimulate your brain and keep it healthy. Once you are used to one activity, try getting out of your comfort zone and doing something new. For example if you are getting good at word search try sudoku or a memory game. Learning new things can be scary,



but it can benefit your brain and give you the confidence to face anything challenging that comes your way.

## Remain Socially Active

Social activity not only makes physical and mental activity more enjoyable, it can reduce stress. Interacting with others activates many parts of your brain and helps you learn new ways of coping with stressful situations. Spending time with family and friends will raise your spirits and give you a positive outlook on life. Call on a family member or

friend to join you in running errands, gardening, cooking, and other everyday activities. Join a club or volunteer as a way to meet new people and give back to your community. Knowing that you have helped others can help you feel better about yourself.



## Take Time for Yourself

Being socially active can be tiring, but you don't have to feel obligated to do everything. Break large tasks into smaller ones so they seem more manageable. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, do things that you enjoy. Make time for yourself by doing your favorite hobby, eating your favorite food, or taking a long bath to sooth aching bones and wash away worrisome thoughts. It is also important to always stay positive. Having an optimistic outlook on life can help you cope with difficult situations and improve your mood. Make it a habit to think positive thoughts about yourself and those around you.

## Resources:

AARP Brain Health:

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

Alzheimer's Association:

[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)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/mentalhealth/depression.htm>