



Employee Assistance Program

Be Better to Your Brain

"I think that I may be losing my mind." Many of us have made this statement in jest, but improving your brain health is no laughing matter. Your brain is command central for your body, and it deserves priority when it comes to managing your health. Don't take your cognitive health for granted.

How healthy is your brain? To find it out, consider these questions from an online quiz developed by Beautiful-Minds.com:

1. How happy would you say you currently are?
2. How many minutes do you spend playing games in a typical day?
3. In a typical week, how many hours do you exercise?
4. How many minutes do you spend reading for personal interest in a typical day?

Twelve questions in total, this quick quiz addresses the four dimensions of brain health that researchers believe are most important: mental, nutritional, social, and physical. Research has suggested that a combination of good nutrition and mental, social, and physical activities may have a greater benefit in maintaining or improving brain health than any single activity.

According to the Alzheimer's Association (ALZ), it's particularly important to take care of your mental health. Some studies link a history of depression with increased risk of cognitive decline, so you should seek medical treatment or other resources if you have symptoms of depression and/or anxiety or other mental health concerns. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is one such resource and oftentimes a great place to start.

At ALZ's international conference last year, a two-year clinical trial of older adults at risk for cognitive impairment showed that a combination of physical activity, nutritional guidance, cognitive training, social activities, and management of heart health risks factors slowed cognitive decline. It's never too soon to be proactive about improving your brain health.

Here are some of ALZ's tips for reducing your risk of cognitive decline:

- **Break a sweat.** Engage in regular cardiovascular exercise that elevates your heart rate and increases blood flow to the brain and body.
- **Hit the books.** Formal education in any stage of life will help reduce your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. For example, take a class at a local college, community center or online.
- **Fuel up right.** Eat a healthy and balanced diet that is higher in vegetables and fruit to help reduce the risk of cognitive decline.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Not getting enough sleep due to conditions like insomnia or sleep apnea may result in problems with memory and thinking.
- **Buddy up.** Staying socially engaged may support brain health. Pursue social activities that are meaningful to you.
- **Get involved in your local community.** If you love animals, consider volunteering at a local shelter. If you enjoy singing, join a local choir or help at an afterschool program.
- **Stump yourself.** Challenge and activate your mind. Complete a jigsaw puzzle. Play games, such as bridge, that make you think strategically. Challenging your mind may have short and long-term benefits for your brain.

So don't wait! Start taking steps to maintain a healthy brain today.



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