

NYS Coalition of Alzheimer's Association Chapters

NYS Nurses Can Help Share Important Messages about Brain Health in June

This June during Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month, the Alzheimer's Association® is encouraging Americans to take charge of their brain health. As a nurse, you are a vital part of a nationwide movement helping people protect their brains and live their best possible life.

Two-thirds of people in the U.S. have at least one major risk factor for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. Because the brain changes that cause Alzheimer's can begin more than 20 years before symptoms start, reducing risk factors can have important benefits for our long-term brain health.

It's likely that Alzheimer's disease develops as a result of multiple factors. Although some risk factors like age can't be changed, many others such as high blood pressure, smoking, and lack of physical activity can. "Understanding the role healthy behaviors may play in reducing cognitive decline is a robust area of research currently," said Erica Salamida, Director of Community Engagement for the NYS Coalition of Alzheimer's Association Chapters. Research shows that adopting healthy behaviors—like getting exercise and good quality sleep—can improve your brain health and reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

Protect Your Brain

Based on the latest scientific evidence, "10 Healthy Habits for Your Brain" is a list of positive, everyday actions you can take to reduce dementia risk. Scientists estimate that up to 45% of dementia cases worldwide may be attributable to modifiable risk factors. "Incorporating these behaviors become especially important as we age," said Salamida. "But they are good guidelines to follow at any age. Research suggests that incorporating these behaviors in combination will have the greatest benefit, but even if you begin with one or two, you're moving in the right direction."

1. **Challenge your mind.** Be curious! Put your brain to work and do something that is new or hard for you. Learn a new skill. Try something artistic. Challenging your mind may have short- and long-term benefits for your brain.
2. **Stay in school.** Education reduces the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Encourage youth to stay in school and pursue the highest level of training possible. Continue your own education by taking a class at a local library, college or online.
3. **Get moving.** Engage in regular exercise. This includes activities that raise your heart rate and increase blood flow to the brain and body. Find ways to build more movement into your day — walking, dancing, gardening — whatever works for you!
4. **Protect your head.** Help prevent an injury to your head. Wear a helmet for activities like biking, and wear a seatbelt. Protect yourself while playing sports. Do what you can to prevent falls, especially for older adults.
5. **Be smoke-free.** Quitting smoking can lower the risk of cognitive decline back to levels similar to those who have not smoked. It's never too late to stop.
6. **Control your blood pressure.** Medications can help lower high blood pressure. And healthy habits like eating right and physical activity can help too. Work with a health care provider to control your blood pressure.
7. **Manage diabetes.** Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or controlled by healthier eating, increasing physical activity and medication, if necessary.
8. **Eat right.** Eating healthier foods can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline. This includes more vegetables and leaner meats/proteins, along with foods that are less processed and lower in fat. Choose healthier meals and

snacks that you enjoy and are available to you.

9. **Maintain a healthy weight.** Talk to your health care provider about the weight that is healthy for you. Other healthy habits on this list — eating right, physical activity and sleep — can help with maintaining a healthy weight.
10. **Sleep well.** Good quality sleep is important for brain health. Stay off screens before bed and make your sleep space as comfortable as possible. Do all you can to minimize disruptions. If you have any sleep-related problems, such as sleep apnea, talk to a health-care provider.

Use a Habit Builder

The Alzheimer's Association® Brain Health Habit Builder is a free online tool to check your current habits and make a plan to help protect your brain. You'll get research-backed guidance to help you make lasting changes and take charge of your brain health. Checking your brain-healthy habits is easy and takes just a few minutes.

You'll receive a personalized plan based on your answers, including guidance and tips to help you make positive changes. It can be hard to build new healthy habits. Taking small steps, like setting a realistic goal for yourself, is a great way to start.

It's never too early or too late to take charge of your brain health, and the Alzheimer's Association has the resources you need to get started. Visit alz.org/habitbuilder and start building your brain-healthy habits today. To learn more about ways to reduce your risk of cognitive decline, go to alz.org/riskreduction. ■