

12 Worst Habits for Your Brain

Slow the onset of dementia by **avoiding these poor** lifestyle choices. ::

BY LYNN ALLISON

WE MAY BLAME misplacing the car keys on getting older, but memory loss, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease are not an inevitable part of aging.

In fact, up to 40% of dementia cases may be prevented or delayed according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While normal aging may mean slower processing skills and more trouble multitasking, routine memory, skills, and knowledge remain stable and may even improve with age, says the CDC.

Research shows that poor lifestyle choices may increase the risk for dementia and other brain-related conditions.

By changing just one of these bad habits, you can help boost brain power and stave off cognitive decline.

1 Lack of sleep. David Friedman, a chiropractic neurologist and bestselling author, tells Newsmax that during sleep the brain resets itself by forming or maintaining neurological pathways for storing, learning, and creating.

Inadequate sleep impairs cognitive function and increases the risk for neurological disorders.

The two areas of the brain most affected by lack of sleep are the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making, and the hippocampus, which plays a major role in memory and learning.

2 Sedentary lifestyle. Joseph Maroon, M.D., a neurosurgeon

and clinical professor of neurological surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, says the “use it or lose it” adage applies not only to our bodies but also to our brains.

“Exercise is essential to keep both in peak performance,” he says. “Chemicals are emitted by exercising the muscles that result in the release of very important growth factors in the brain.

“Exercise is the ‘fertilizer’ for the formation of new brain cells, new synaptic connections, and neuroplasticity.”

3 Not taking a multivitamin. A recent study co-authored by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health researchers found that older adults who took a multivitamin for one year experienced improvements in memory equivalent to delaying aging by three years, compared to those who took a placebo.

“This benefit was maintained throughout the three years of the study,” Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., a board-certified physician and author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic*, tells Newsmax.

“It is likely that multivitamins higher in B vitamins and folic acid would have even greater benefits.”

4 Negative thinking. Researchers from the Yale School of Public Health found older adults with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) who had an optimistic outlook about growing older were 30% more likely to regain normal cognition than their counterparts with a more pessimistic view of aging.



5 Avoiding eggs. Several studies have demonstrated that eating eggs may boost brain health, without affecting cholesterol levels, says Teitelbaum.

“Even the American Heart Association notes that moderate egg intake does the heart no harm,” he says.

“Research has shown that people who ate diets rich in phosphatidylcholine, found in eggs and other foods, were 28% less likely to develop dementia.”

6 Drinking alcohol. Alcohol's neurotoxic effects can harm the brain, says Friedman.



“It can directly damage cells of the cerebrum and disrupt communication between the neurons, leading to neurodegeneration.”

Alcohol impairs cognitive function, particularly decision-making and impulse control.

A study conducted last year by the University of Pennsylvania revealed that even light-to-moderate drinking can shrink the brain. As little as half a beer daily was enough to trigger a decrease in brain volume.

“The impact became more pronounced with higher levels of alcohol consumption,” says Friedman.

7 Giving in to stress. Chronic or prolonged stress can lead to the overproduction of stress hormones, such as cortisol, which disrupt the balance of neurotransmitters in the brain and impair communication between neurons in the cerebrum.

Stress contributes to brain inflammation and has been linked to shrinkage of the hippocampus.

“Adopting the mindset of not stressing over things you can’t change has been a game-changer for me,” says Friedman. “It’s a simple yet powerful principle that has successfully eliminated 85% of stress from my life.”

8 Staying out of the sun. “This horrible myth is triggering an epidemic of vitamin D deficiency,” says Teitelbaum.

Recent studies have shown that phototherapy or simply increasing light exposure markedly improved cognitive testing, he says.

Your skin makes vitamin D when exposed to the sun, so try to spend some time outside every day.

A prospective cohort study of 12,388 participants from the National Alzheimer’s Coordinating Center database found that those who took vitamin D supplements were 40% less likely to develop dementia than those who did not take the supplements.

The effects of vitamin D were significantly greater in females versus males.

9 Not challenging your brain. As we age, we may gravitate to easier forms of entertainment in our spare time, such as streaming our favorite shows or surfing the internet.

But Maroon, who is the neurological consultant for the NFL’s Pittsburgh Steelers and an expert in neuroscience, says “specific brain-training techniques, which include working with puzzles, memory games, video games that require problem solving, and activities that enhance cognition all contribute to enhancing brain health and neuroplasticity.”

10 Lack of purpose. A lack of purpose or meaning in life can result in deactivation in areas of the brain associated with motivation, goal setting, and reward processing, says Friedman.

“The brain thrives on meaningful and fulfilling experiences, which provide a sense of reward and well-being. Without these positive experiences, people may be more susceptible to feelings of emptiness, low mood, and decreased mental health.”

11 Eating highly processed foods. A recent analysis of more than 60,000 seniors found that those who followed a Mediterranean diet were 25% less likely to develop dementia.

The protective effect was apparent even among those with genes that put them at higher risk for the disease, according to a report published earlier this year in the medical journal BMC Medicine.

The Mediterranean diet focuses on plant-based foods, whole grains, fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon and sardines, and olive oil, with little or no meat or sweets.

12 Suffering in silence. A new study of more than 19,000 men and women revealed that chronic pain is associated with loss of hippocampal volume and increased risk for dementia.

Researchers found that people who had chronic pain in five or more areas had neurological changes equivalent to eight years of excess brain aging, compared to participants with no pain.

“The advice to put up with pain as you get older is another horrible myth,” notes Teitelbaum. “Some physicians believe that all pain is tolerable — as long as it is somebody else’s. But our published research shows that most pain can be eliminated naturally by getting to the root cause of the discomfort.” □