How to keep your brain sharp as you age

So you’ve noticed some changes in your thinking. Perhaps you often misplace your keys or have trouble coming up with the right word in conversations. But how do you know if these changes are a normal part of getting older, or if they might be pointing to a health problem such as dementia?

How Your Brain Changes as You Get Older
Your brain’s volume gradually shrinks as you get older. When this occurs, some of the nerve cells in your brain can shrink or lose connections with other nerve cells. Blood flow within your brain slows somewhat as you age, too. These age-related changes are thought to be behind the differences in cognitive function many people notice as they age. Everyone has lapses in memory from time to time, but significant memory loss is not a normal part of getting older. It’s important to talk with your doctor if you or a loved one is experiencing memory loss and other cognitive symptoms that interfere with normal activities and relationships.

7 Tips for Staying Mentally Sharp as a Senior
Promising research indicates that taking the following steps can help keep your mind sharp as you age:

Control cholesterol problems and high blood pressure. These conditions can increase your risk for heart disease and stroke, which are thought to contribute to the development of certain types of dementia. Cardiovascular health — having healthy blood sugar, cholesterol levels, and blood pressure, along with being physically active, eating a nutritious diet, maintaining a healthy weight, and not smoking — was associated with better cognitive function in a study published in PLoS One.

Don’t smoke or drink excessively. Because these are both seen as putting you at increased risk for dementia, kick the habit if you smoke and, if you drink, do so only in moderation.

Exercise regularly. Regular physical activity is thought to help maintain blood flow to the brain and reduce your risk for conditions such as high blood pressure that are associated with the development of dementia. Consistent vigorous exercise helps lower the risk for dementia, according to a study published in the Annals of Medicine in 2015.

Eat a healthy diet. Researchers have found strong evidence that vitamin E, B vitamins, and omega-3 fatty acids could help prevent dementia, along with avoiding saturated fat, according to an article published in 2016 in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences. Specifically, researchers have found evidence that green leafy vegetables, other vegetables, berries, and seafood are neuroprotective. Studies have also found the Mediterranean diet and the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet to have protective benefits against dementia. The Mediterranean diet emphasizes vegetables, healthy fats like olive oil, and omega-3 fatty acids from fish, and the DASH diet focuses on fruits and veggies, fat-free or low-fat dairy, whole grains, and lean meats, along with cutting back on processed foods and limiting red meat. A new diet called MIND (Mediterranean–DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) incorporates many elements of the Mediterranean diet and DASH but with modifications that reflect current evidence for brain neuroprotection, according to the article in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.

Get a good education. People with more years of formal education are at lower risk for Alzheimer’s and other dementias than those with fewer years of formal education, according to the Alzheimer’s Association. Some researchers believe that having more years of education builds “cognitive reserve,” which is the brain’s ability to use connections between neurons (nerve cells) to enable you to continue to carry out cognitive tasks despite damaging brain changes.

Stimulate your brain. Having a mentally stimulating job and engaging in other mentally stimulating activities may also help build cognitive reserve, according to the Alzheimer’s Association. You can also keep your mind active by learning new skills. A 2017 study published in The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry suggests that acquiring skills in later life, including those related to adopting new technologies, may have the potential to reduce or delay cognitive changes associated with aging. In the study, older adults took a weekly, two-hour class in which they learned how to use a tablet computer. After the 10-week training, engagement in this new, mentally challenging activity was associated with improved processing speed.

Socialize more. Making new friends or spending time with the ones you have might be good for your brain. A 2018 study published in Scientific Reports that looked at older adults in China found that participants with consistently high or increased social engagement had a lower risk of dementia than those with consistently low social engagement. Contributed by Everyday Health and Marie Suszynski
Do you find it increasingly difficult to pay for necessary prescription drugs? Maybe your drug copays have increased or your doctor has prescribed a pricey brand-name drug that’s not covered by your plan.

There are practical ways to weave through the pharmaceutical maze so you can get the drugs you need to stay healthy — and even have a little cash left over.

It all starts with your neighborhood pharmacist. Here are five ways that the druggist can help you save money on your prescriptions:

1. Explore all your options
2. Learn about Patience Assistance Programs
3. Go Generic, When Possible
4. Get Answers to your Drug Plan Questions
5. Schedule a Medication Therapy Review

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