

You care about your brain. We do, too.

5 Common Misconceptions About the Aging Brain

The US National Institute on Aging (n.d.c) refuted many of the myths associated with brain health and cognitive performance as we get older.

1. Depression and loneliness are normal in older adults

No, while depression and [loneliness](#) can have a significant impact on brain health and mental wellbeing, they are not inevitable as we age. In fact, as people get older, they often form closer relationships with friends and loved ones and live happy and fulfilling lives.

2. Older adults don't need as much sleep

No, older adults still typically require seven to nine hours of sleep. [Good sleep practices](#) remain vital to staying healthy and alert while promoting mental wellbeing and cognitive performance.

3. Older adults are unable to learn new things

No, our brains are [neuroplastic](#) at all ages, though there is a reduction in plasticity. They can continue to change and make new connections as we develop new skills, seek out social connections, and create new meaningful experiences.

4. We will all get dementia as we get older

No, while the risk of dementia increases as we age, it is not inevitable. Two-thirds of people over the age 85 do not develop dementia, many of whom receive support through care and medication.

5. If our parents have Alzheimer's disease, then so will we

No, while genetics is a factor that can increase the risk, there are many others, including health, lifestyle, and environment. It is worth seeking professional advice to understand the risks and how they can be reduced.

8 Lifestyle Strategies & Habits for a Healthy Mind

While several factors and triggers are outside our control, we can adopt many positive strategies and habits to give us the best possible opportunity for [positive aging](#) (National Institute on Aging, n.d.a; Ballesteros, 2022).

1. *Maintain physical wellness*

Taking care of physical wellbeing supports cognitive wellness (National Institute on Aging, n.d.a).

- Attend recommended health screenings and checkups.
- Manage health problems and take appropriate medication for diabetes, depression, high cholesterol, and depression.

- Reduce the risk of brain injuries from falls, etc.
 - Limit alcohol and avoid illicit drug use.
 - Do not smoke or take other nicotine products.
 - Aim for between seven and nine hours of sleep.
 - Manage high blood pressure by discussing it with a doctor and taking prescribed medication.
2. *Physical exercise*
Regular physical activity is vital for physical and mental wellbeing. Activities such as aerobic exercise, dance, martial arts, and tai chi can be beneficial to maintaining good cognitive performance.
 3. *Eat healthily*
While a healthy diet reduces the risk of chronic diseases, it is also recommended for brain health.
 4. *Social engagement and staying connected*
Building and maintaining social connections and getting involved in community activities is essential to keeping a healthy mind — as is avoiding chronic loneliness. Visit friends and family, volunteer for local organizations, or find a new, shared hobby.
 5. *Cognitive training and engagement*
Keeping a healthy mind that is active and engaged is vital for better memory and problem-solving skills. This might include memory training, mental skills, video games, reading, playing board games, or learning new languages.
 6. *Embrace new talents*
Engagement in activities such as music, dance, art, and creative writing can improve quality of life, self-esteem, and memory.
 7. *Manage stress*
While short-term stress can help focus our thoughts, **chronic stress** can damage the brain. Manage stress better by doing exercise, going for walks, listening to music, writing in a journal, and joining relaxation classes.
 8. *Review medicines*
Consult a physician regularly to monitor and review the impact of drugs and supplements on brain health.

The activities above positively affect cognition in older adults and reduce mental decline (Ballesteros, 2022).

Source: PositivePsychology
<https://positivepsychology.com/healthy-mind/>