

Do These 3 Things Today to Keep Your Memory From Failing Later

~Dr. Mark Hyman via MindBodyGreen.com

Memory loss is not a normal part of aging; it does not have to be our fate (despite what you may have heard from doctors or articles). There's another way to think about brain aging. The brain responds to all the same insults as the rest of the body—stress, poor diet, toxins, lack of exercise or sleep, nutritional deficiencies, and more. We can prevent and reverse cognitive decline, at any age, when the right steps are taken. But memory loss is not just limited to seniors. Up to 5 percent of all Alzheimer's cases are early-onset—which can happen at any age, but the general description is that it's prior to 65 years old.

Naming a disease, such as Alzheimer's or dementia, is becoming increasingly useless. We must think about individuals, not diseases. We must look at the way the entire body is working instead of isolating one symptomatic area and treating it independently. By assessing the entire body as a whole, in addition to mental, emotional, and spiritual health, we're able to get to the root cause of health problems and turn them around for good.

Here are my top three tips for what you can do starting today to improve your memory and nourish a healthy brain for many years to come:

1. Focus on your food.

This seemingly simple tip has major impacts. At least 75 percent of your plate, by volume, should be filled with colorful plant foods. These colorful superfoods come loaded with brain-boosting compounds, like phytonutrients and antioxidants that can fight free radical damage. Enjoy an array of colorful options like blueberries, radishes, and tomatoes, and make sure you're eating tons of dark leafy greens like kale, Swiss chard, spinach, and arugula. Also, eat plenty of fat. Fat makes up a huge portion of the brain—60 percent—which is why low-fat diets can cause fatigue, brain fog, mood swings, and other annoying symptoms. Focus on getting adequate healthy fats from real food sources like wild-caught fish and grass-fed meats, avocados, olive oil, coconut butter, and nuts and seeds.

It's also important to optimize protein. We need about 30 grams of protein per meal to build muscle. When you lose muscle, you age faster, and your brain takes a huge hit! Eat some protein at every meal. Avoid sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, trans fats, food additives, and preservatives, all of which poison your brain and disrupt your biochemistry. Alzheimer's is now considered "type 3 diabetes," as we can see this type of neurodegeneration links to insulin resistance. Another key reason to eat low-glycemic whole foods.

2. Get moving.

This does not mean you have to go to the gym; you can do whatever you find fun, relaxing, or exciting, as long as you get your whole body moving. Find something that you find joy in. Movement is essential for a healthy brain; it improves blood flow and metabolism, increases insulin sensitivity, challenges our engagement, and can actually improve brain structure and function, even in the aging population. Hiking, yoga, rock climbing, swimming—whatever it is, do it regularly. Extra points for getting active with friends, since connecting with others is another powerful way to support your cognition. Social isolation has been linked to an array of detrimental health effects including cognitive decline.

3. Let yourself rest.

Stress is extremely harmful to the body in more ways than one, including its ability to hurt your brain. Stress hormones damage the hippocampus—the memory center in the brain—causing memory loss and dementia. Studies have even found that perceived stress is an independent risk factor for preclinical stages of Alzheimer's, creating mild cognitive impairment that can continue to worsen with chronic exposure. And sleep is just as important. This is the time we allow our brains to rest and detoxify, and we know that sleep deprivation negatively affects the connectivity between neurons in the hippocampus as well.

The good news, though, is that there is much you can do to stop these impacts on the brain. Create space for downtime, reduce all the business that's become so standard day in and day out. Go for a walk outside, meditate, or drink some tea and read a good book. Practice good sleep hygiene—take an hour before bed to dim the lights and do something calming (preferably away from screens), then give yourself seven to eight hours to get some solid shut-eye. Anything that helps you rest, relax, and unwind will help your brain stay healthy for the long haul.

Memory loss is an avoidable part of aging; there are actually many simple and natural interventions you can take right now to retain a sharp mind, no matter what your age.