

# TO YOUR HEALTH

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## Brain Health Maeve Lobo LICSW

This month has been designated Alzheimer and Brain Awareness month by the Alzheimer's Association. One in three seniors will succumb to Alzheimer's or a dementia related illness. The pandemic has exacerbated conditions for patients and caregivers alike. One of the many conclusions of COVID-19 research is the brain damage it can cause for individuals over the age of 70. Encephalitis and strokes are some of the effects of COVID-19 infection. Cognitive impairment has also been identified as a side effect of COVID-19 illness. The impact of COVID-19 on our brain health has been extensive, but the horizon is looking brighter. There are ways to act and stay healthy. It is time to reboot and create a prescription for good health. The tools in everyday life that can enhance a person's well-being and improve memory are accessible to all of us.



### Pillars of Brain Health

- There is a strong correlation between sleep and immune function. Research in 2011 noted that nocturnal sleep facilitates an increase in T cells. These are a type of white blood cells responsible for your immune system. Make sure you get a good night's sleep.
- Being socially connected reduces the risk of mortalities and morbidities. A longitudinal study carried out by the Harvard Second Generation Study illustrated that those who maintain relationships are happier and experience

better health in their eighties. Research indicated that it crossed the socio-economic divide. In addition, the quality of relationships also has a significant impact on your mental well-being.

- Keeping to an exercise schedule has been identified as a principal factor to maintain brain health. The CDC reports that the most significant form of



exercise among individuals 65 and older include walking and gardening or yardwork. However, by the age of 75 one in three men and two in three women are not engaged in any physical exercise. Just 5-10 minutes of moderate exercise is an ideal way to initiating incremental change.

- Volunteering creates a sense of purpose and promotes an active lifestyle. There is an abundance of research that demonstrates volunteering causes less disability and individuals can live longer. Research has also shown that among bereaved adults, periods of depression are reduced when volunteering. A sense of purpose helps create positive thinking.

- Sharpen your brain by acquiring a new skill. Learning a language or an instrument has shown to decreased cognitive decline.

This may appear to be a lofty aspiration for some of us but there are alternatives. Pick up a subject and explore it in some depth. Learning to log on to Zoom has



certainly been a boost to our brain power.

### Kitchen Friends or Foes

Here are a few thoughts to digest while checking out your pantry cupboards. Consider adding and avoiding the following foods in your diet to improve your brain health.

Omega 3 fatty acids have been known to help with brain structure and function. DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) one of the three Omega fatty acid is found in the retina, brain, and sperm cells.

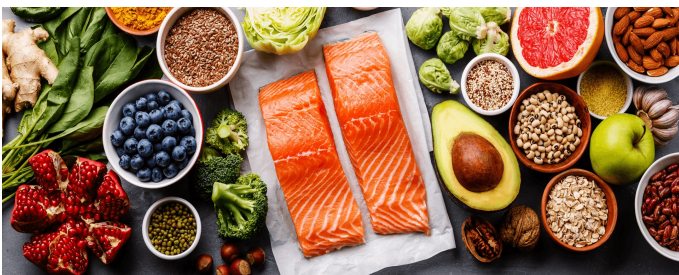
#### Food rich in Omega-3s

- Fish and Seafoods
- Nuts and Seeds - flax, chia, and walnuts.
- Plant Oil – soy, flax, and canola

The German Center for Neurodegenerative disease in May 2021 concluded that eating a Mediterranean rich diet can help reduce cognitive impairment and memory loss. The 512 participants over the age of 70 reviewed 148 foods they had consumed in a three-month period. The memory tests that followed indicated that those eating a diet rich in vegetables and fish scored higher.

Your Mediterranean plate should include

- Weekly helpings of fish, poultry, and eggs
- Daily consumption of fruits and whole grains
- Small portions of dairy products and limit red meat



Skip foods with a high concentration of fructose syrup such as soda. Avoid trans fats like fried foods and saturated fats, which include dairy products. Try saying no to enriched or bleached flour.

### Heads Up

Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) hospitalizations are highest among individuals 75 years and older. Unintentional falls in this age group are primary factor for a TBI. Unintentional falls cover a host of issues which include lower body weakness, poor vision, difficulty with balance, improper footwear, uneven steps and home hazards like throw rugs and clutter.

To prevent head injuries regularly review medications and continue with your annual eye exam.

### A Matter of Fact

- The brain is one of the fattiest organs in the body.
- While awake the human brain can generate 23 watts. A clock radio runs on 10 watts.
- The brain receives 20% of the total blood and oxygen produced by the body.
- The human brain weighs 3 pounds.
- There are almost 100,000 miles of blood vessels in the brain.

Sources:

[Cdc.gov/traumaticbrain injury](https://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/)

[Cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/olderadult](https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/olderadult)

[Nih.com](https://www.nih.com)

