

By: Alisha Fisher

K-State Research and Extension Greenwood County

Family and Community Wellness Extension Agent

“Brain Boost”

In today’s fast-paced world, finding time or energy for physical activity can feel like a challenge. But when it comes to health, especially brain health the science consistently sides against the sedentary lifestyle. During moderate to vigorous movement, the body releases hormones and neurotransmitters that naturally boost mood, increase energy levels, enhance memory, and improve overall well-being. While your muscles may feel tired after exercise, your mind often feels more relaxed, confident, and accomplished. That positive feeling is a powerful motivator to keep going.

Current research suggests that several key habits contribute to maintaining a healthy brain: be physically active (at least 150 minutes per week), manage blood pressure and cholesterol, prioritize quality sleep, avoid smoking and vaping, stay socially connected, address hearing loss, eat a balanced, brain-supportive diet, and challenge your brain by learning new skills throughout life.

Physical activity increases blood flow to the brain and may help slow the natural loss of connections between brain cells that occurs with age. It also helps reduce the risk of falls, supports emotional well-being, assists in managing conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, and promotes independence, all of which are linked to better brain health. The best kind of physical activity is the one you enjoy and will stick with. Walking is a great option for most people, but other beneficial activities include water aerobics, yard work, pickleball, tennis, team sports, and even adapted movement for those in wheelchairs. A good guideline is to move enough that you can talk comfortably, but not sing.

A healthy diet also plays a vital role in supporting cognitive function. A combination of the Mediterranean and DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating patterns, often referred to as the MIND diet, has been shown to slow brain aging by up to 7.5 years and lower the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease. Some of the most beneficial foods for brain health include leafy green vegetables, other vegetables and fruits (especially berries), whole grains, fish, poultry, beans, nuts, and olive oil. Try to limit foods like red meat, butter, cheese, sweets, fried items, and highly processed snacks. Alcohol can be part of a healthy diet in moderation. A 5-ounce glass of wine per day may be okay for some, but it’s important to remember that your body processes alcohol differently as you age. Excessive alcohol consumption, more than 8 drinks a week for women or 15 for men, has been linked to an increased risk of dementia. If you don’t drink, there’s no reason to start now.

Even without a family history, anyone can develop Alzheimer’s or other types of dementia. However, having a parent or sibling with Alzheimer’s increases your risk, and the risk is even higher with more than one first-degree relative affected. Talk with your healthcare provider to better understand your personal risk factors and to get advice tailored to your health needs. A sharp, healthy brain is something you can actively work toward every day. Whether it’s taking a brisk walk, adding more vegetables to your plate, learning a new skill, or connecting with friends, small, consistent choices can have a lasting impact on your brain and overall well-being.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.