



PHOEBE MINISTRIES

Taking Care of Your Brain

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The Alzheimer's Association International Conference recently convened in Boston and a number of interesting studies were shared suggesting that the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease can be reduced. In one study, researchers shared data from a comparison of 90-year-old individuals living in England with data from 90-year-olds who were tested a decade ago. This study found that the prevalence rate of dementia was 24% lower in the current 90-year-old group than anticipated by the projections based on the group 10 years ago. The researchers attribute this finding to the fact that people are taking better care of themselves. Improvements that have occurred in diet, exercise and healthcare appear to be good for the brain.

So what do findings like these mean for the average person? The clearest implication of these findings is that the things we do earlier in life really do matter for our health and well-being later in life. In particular, the wellness-related habits that we engage in for a healthy heart are the same ones we should engage in to protect our brain health. For example, a healthy diet that is low in saturated and trans fat and high in fruits, vegetables and critical nutrients helps to ensure that the brain is well nourished and healthy. In fact, the Alzheimer's Association of America suggests following a heart healthy diet and offers the following resource on their site: <http://www.alz.org/we-can-help-adopt-a-brain-healthy-diet.asp>

Regular exercise is another important way to reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Current findings suggest that even 30 to 45 minutes of brisk walking at least 3 times a week can be sufficient to reduce the risk of cognitive decline due to dementia. In a study discussed at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference last year, findings were reported indicating that moderate exercise at this level actually increased the size and function of the parts of the brain most responsible for memory function.

In another study, resistance training was found to improve the cognitive function of people who were already demonstrating mild cognitive impairment. The take-home message here is that exercise is good for us at every age, and even those who are already experiencing memory problems benefit from regular exercise. All these findings make it clear that our brain health truly lies in our own hands. Some may be waiting for pharmaceutical companies to develop a cure for Alzheimer's disease, and in truth, advances are being made in understanding the factors that contribute to the development of Alzheimer's disease. But while the scientists work to better understand the multiple mechanisms that play a role in the development of Alzheimer's and other dementias, we already know enough to recognize the benefit of engaging in a healthy, active lifestyle to take care of your brain.