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Love your Brain

Ask someone what the most important part of his or her body is, and most would probably say “my brain!” Ask anyone what he or she does to preserve cognitive function, and the answer may not come so easily.

New year advertising campaigns force Americans to consider prominent health habits like diet and physical activity. If the brain is so important to us, shouldn't we pay attention to that as well? According to the Alzheimer's Association®, doing so could help reduce risk of developing chronic memory loss.

Dementia is a catchall word, encompassing several disorders that cause memory loss, personality changes, or some sort of impairment. It is a nonreversible decline in mental function. Alzheimer's disease is a specific disease within the dementia definition that slowly and irreversibly destroys memory and thinking skills. There is a difference between the two and a correct diagnosis means getting the correct medications and support needed.

Anyone is at risk for developing dementia or Alzheimer's disease, but growing evidence indicates that individuals can keep their brains healthier by adopting certain key habits. These 10 ways to love your brain are courtesy of the Alzheimer's Association®:

- **Catch Some ZZZ's** – Not getting enough sleep may result in problems with memory and thinking.
- **Fuel Up Right** – Eat a balanced diet that is higher in vegetables and fruits to help reduce the risk of cognitive decline.
- **Heads Up!** – Brain injury can raise risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Wear a seat belt and use a helmet when playing contact sports or riding a bike or ATV.
- **Follow Your Heart** – Risk factors for cardiovascular disease and stroke – obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes – have a negative impact on your cognitive health.
- **Butt Out** – Smoking increases risk of cognitive decline. Quitting smoking can reduce risk to levels comparable to those who have not smoked.
- **Hit The Books** – Formal education will help reduce risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Take a class at a local college, community center, or online.
- **Break a Sweat** – Engage in regular cardiovascular exercise that elevates heart rate and increases blood flow. Studies have found that physical activity reduces risk of cognitive decline.
- **Stump Yourself** – Challenge your mind. Build a piece of furniture. Play games of strategy.
- **Buddy Up** – Studies show that staying socially engaged may support brain health. Find ways to be part of your local community or share activities with friends and family.
- **Take Care Of Your Mental Health** – Some studies link depression with cognitive decline, so seek treatment if you have depression, anxiety, or stress.

When possible, combine as many of these habits as possible to ensure a healthier brain and body!

Source – Alzheimer's Association (alz.org/10ways).