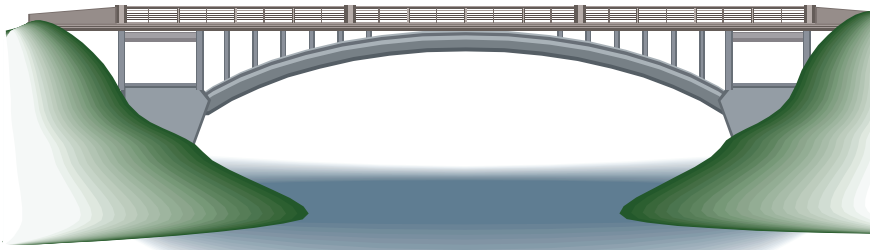


MHASI Matters



“Building Bridges Between Mental Health and Aging”

Summer 2009

**Brain Fitness =
Brain Health**

USE IT OR LOSE IT!!!

Cognitive fitness is a state of mind in which we are performing well mentally, emotionally, and functionally. Attaining it entails following healthy-brain practices, such as exercising the mind and body, staying socially connected, eating and sleeping well, and managing stress.

Benefits from such practices range from cellular and biochemical changes at the level of neurons and synapses to whole brain changes, such as denser neural networks or more efficient neural processing. These are manifested as improved cognitive functioning—better memory, faster learning, greater attention and focus—and as emotional well-being.

Brain healthy lifestyle is a combination of many factors, each of which has its own benefits to the brain. When combined, the benefits are likely to be additive: The more brain-healthy practices you follow, the greater the benefits.

Of course, no one can guarantee that adopting a brain-healthy lifestyle will absolutely ensure good cognitive health until your dying day, but the potential benefits of shaping up your brain are increasingly well-documented.

Increasing your level of physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your brain. Start at 10 minutes daily and work up to 30 minutes for 5 days a week. For cognitive fitness, get moving!

The Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives

Brain Fitness Fundamentals

- Increase mental activity
- Increase physical activity
- Increase levels of social interaction
- Stimulate the mind
- Mediterranean diet
- Get adequate sleep—6-8°
- Manage stress
- Control weight
- Monitor cholesterol
- Monitor blood pressure
- Stop smoking
- Monitor blood sugar

Upcoming Event

September 18—14th Annual and 4th Regional Behavioral Health, Aging and Wellness Conference in Fairview Heights, Illinois at Sheraton Four Points on Highway 64. For more information, contact 618-877-4420 ext. 3013 CEUs

Staying Young by Controlling Your Blood Insulin and Glucose Levels

The three major metabolic changes that lead to premature aging and disease are:

1. Reduction in **glucose tolerance** and the ability of muscle tissue to utilize glucose
2. **Hyperinsulinemia** or high blood insulin, in response to #1
3. **Hyperlipidemia** (high cholesterol and triglycerides, related to atherosclerosis and hardening of the arteries) resulting from #1, #2.

All three of these metabolic changes, along with high blood pressure, increased abdominal fat, and elevated uric acid, are characteristic of the ominous-sounding "Syndrome X."

What Happens?

1. High blood insulin levels seen in Syndrome X are the result of insulin resistance.
2. Insulin resistance is related to the age-related loss of sensitivity of cell membranes to insulin.
3. Insulin is needed to transport glucose to the inside of cells. In special organelles called mitochondria, insulin is utilized along with oxygen to make energy.
4. As cells desperately need energy, they signal for more glucose. The body responds with more insulin, resulting in hyperinsulinemia.
5. One of insulin's many functions is to signal liver enzymes to make cholesterol, leading to triglycerides to rise in the blood.
6. Insulin also tells the body to burn sugar, not fats. Therefore, fatty acids known as triglycerides rise in the blood.
7. Insulin tells the body to store fat, not burn it, promoting obesity, particularly as abdominal fat.
8. The above cluster of signs leads to greatly increased incidence of heart disease and stroke, leading some authorities to call Syndrome X "the silent killer."

The Language of Depression of Older Adults

We need to increase our awareness of both what is spoken and what is left unsaid. "I'm a little down: or I've been feeling a bit sad since my wife died." The initial complaint could be physical, interpersonal, or financial. We may need to probe a little more to unmask a depressive episode.

A sense of emptiness is a red flag which is found associated with suicidal ideation and action. Most symptoms are expressed as physical complaints. A noticeable disruption of sleep-wake cycle, fatigue, and change in appetite are associated with late life depression. A sad or blank expression and crying spells as well as constipation and psychomotor agitation and retardation are also signs.

Depression is treatable. It is not a normal part of the aging process.

What is the Secret to Living to 100?

This is Generation C (Roman numeral for 100)

The myth is that the oldest old are doddering and dependent. Frail individuals die sooner, leaving only a relatively robust group still alive. The rewards of living a long life is that for the most part, the extra years are healthy years.

Physical activity is a recurring theme—walking, biking, golfing, tai chi, and karate. Exercising the brain is important too—reading, painting, and playing musical instruments. Some continue to work. Retirement is a mixed blessing.

The period of serious illness and disability for the exceptionally long-lived tends to be brief. This could be called compressed morbidity. Everything goes at once.

Good genes could play a role. The gene called apolipoprotein E increases the risk for cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's disease. This variant is absent or rare in centenarians. Health conditions through sanitation and medical interventions also improve the odds for long life.

Diet and other health habits play a role, too. Centenarians have higher levels of Vitamins A and E compared with healthy younger adults. This may strengthen the immune system and defend them against damage done by oxygen free radicals which some researchers believe is the principal cause of aging. Frequent consumption of nuts, not eating meat, and medium body weight added 1.5-2.5 years of life.

Lifestyle may play a role:

- Don't smoke or drink heavily—those who had smoked didn't do so for long.
- Don't gain weight during adulthood
- Don't overeat, use less fat (use omega-3 fatty acids and unsaturated fats)
- Do get regular physical activity for as long as able—strength-building
- Do challenge the mind, especially men
- Do have a positive outlook—shed stress, especially emotional stress
- Do be friendly and maintain close ties with family and friends—it lowers depression and heart disease

BOTTOM LINE

Don't smoke, keep trim, get exercise, manage stress, and avoid social isolation.

From Harvard Medical School

Questions or Comments? Contact the Gero-Psych Specialist in your area.

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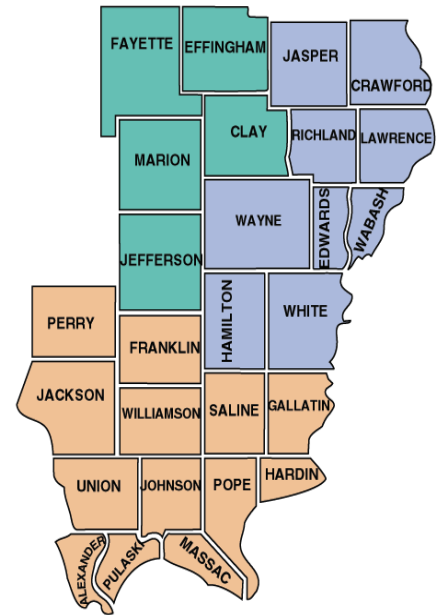
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