

IS COGNITIVE DECLINE AVOIDABLE?

WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE LATEST BRAIN HEALTH SCIENCE

TOTAL BRAIN HEALTH INSIGHTS

BY CYNTHIA R. GREEN, PH.D.
PRESIDENT, TOTAL BRAIN HEALTH

What if you could reduce your risk of cognitive decline? No doubt you would be excited to take a very close look at whatever you could do to preserve your thinking and avoid memory loss.

Get ready to look at cognitive wellness training.

A Rush University study published last month underscores once again that lifestyle interventions are perhaps our most powerful tool in addressing cognitive decline. Using longitudinal data from the Rush Memory and Aging Project, researchers studied the role healthy lifestyle played in modifying dementia. Their findings, based on 24+ years of data from 754 subjects with an average age at death of 90.9 years, confirmed the critical role behavioral choice makes in dementia risk.

A brain healthy lifestyle is linked to better cognitive performance at the end of life.

Using self-report data, the Rush team developed a lifestyle scale score based on 5 factors: Noncurrent smoking, 150+ minutes of physical activity/week, limited alcohol consumption, adherence to a brain healthy diet (MIND diet), and a high degree of cognitive activity. They then compared subjects based on their lifestyle score, cognitive test scores proximal to death, and neuropathology at autopsy. Study outcomes showed that a higher lifestyle score was significantly correlated with better global cognitive function in the subjects' final years.



A brain healthy lifestyle preserves cognitive independence even when dementia pathology was present.

The Rush team additionally looked at the association between lifestyle score and the presence of neuropathology typically associated with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias at the time of death. They found that folks who led a brain healthy lifestyle maintained their cognitive independence into their final years, even if they had changes in their brain tissue typical of dementia. This provides strong evidence for cognitive reserve theory, which maintains that healthy engagement reduces the expression of cognitive loss during one's lifetime, even when pathological changes are present in the brain.

What's the bottom line?

The Rush study confirms what we already know – leading a brain healthy lifestyle reduces cognitive decline. It also offers a finding uniquely valuable to us at every age, as it provides insight to the power of lifestyle interventions in promoting cognitive independence well into late life.

Cognitive wellness training turns the science into action.

Brain healthy living is clearly the most impactful tool we have to reduce dementia risk, even well into our later years. And cognitive wellness training is the best way we can bring that science home. Puzzles and tech games are poor substitutes for practicing the real science behind how brain healthy living to make a difference in our lives. Instead look for ways you can engage across physical, cognitive, and social and emotional wellness to boost thinking, reduce dementia risk, and maintain health and independence.

President and founder of Total Brain Health, Cynthia R. Green, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist, author and nationally recognized expert on memory fitness and brain health.

Learn more at totalbrainhealth.com

About Total Brain Health

Dedicated to helping all minds thrive, we empower adults 50+ with science-backed, experiential training programs to build better brain health. With products that support all levels of cognitive fitness, we are proud to be a top provider of brain training programs in the U.S.