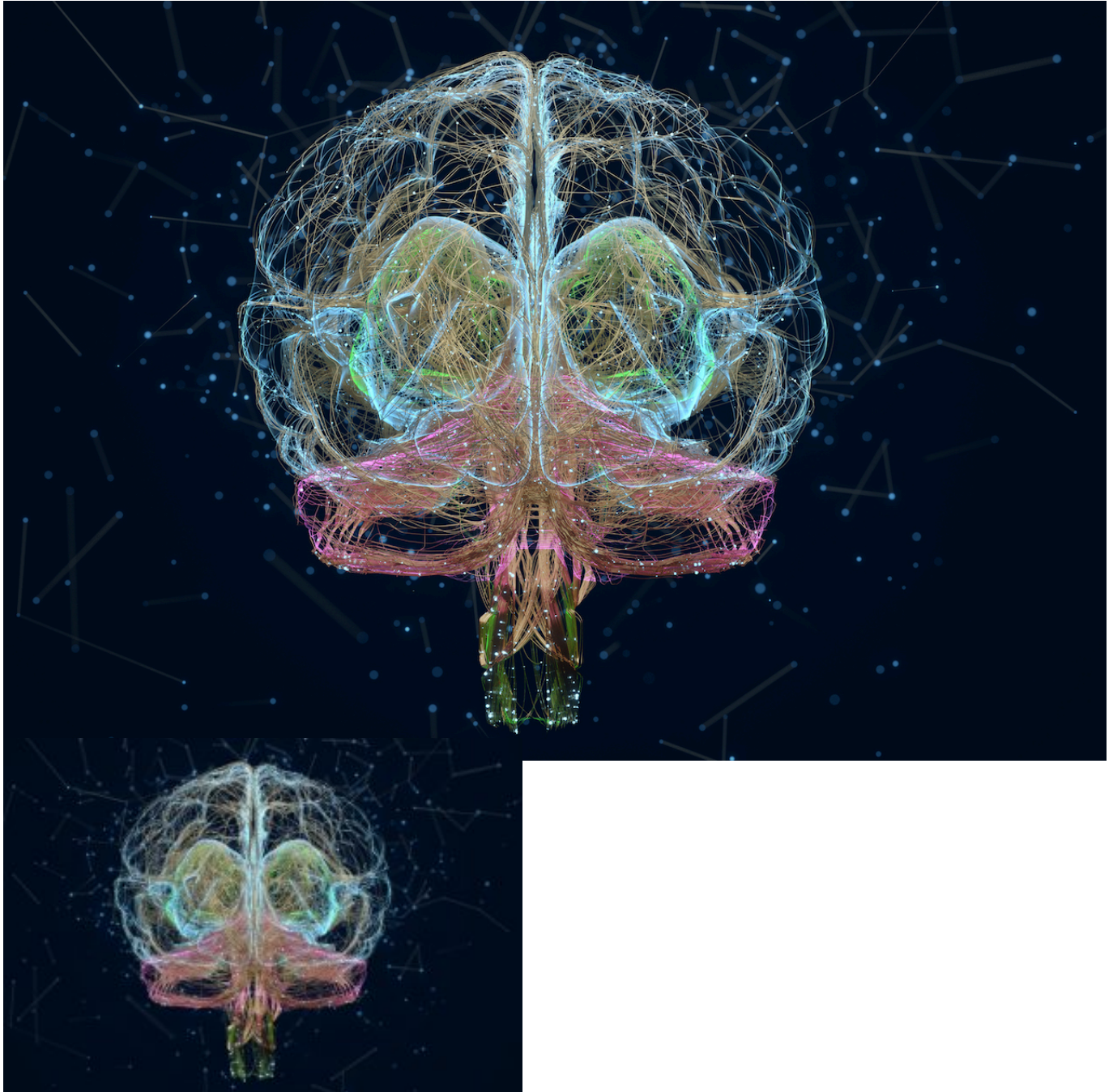


Brain Aging and Dementia



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Around the entire world, more people are living longer lives. According to the United Nation's World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision, by 2050, one in six people in the world will be over age 65, up from one in 11 in 2019. The number of persons aged 80 years or over is projected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050.

When we think about aging, we often think of our skin, bone, lungs, or heart health. But what

about our brain — arguably one of the most important organs in the human body?

Every brain changes with age, and mental function changes along with it. As we understand brain development and aging, interesting questions spring up: How do we maintain cognitive function throughout life? Do we have any control over our brains as we age? If so, what can we do to protect cognitive health as we age?

Brain Aging Throughout Life Stages

Everyone has memory blips from time to time – the word that’s on the very tip of your tongue or the house keys that aren’t where you swear you left them. As you get older, these kinds of slip-ups may happen more often.

According to a Gallup Poll, 14% of younger adults, 22% of middle-aged adults, and 26% of older adults report memory complaints. However, adults experience fewer memory issues as they adopt healthier habits.

There are 3 natural stages of brain aging:

1. Normal aging (memory slips are mild and relatively stable)
2. Mild cognitive impairment (cognitive challenges are more frequent but don’t interfere with independence)
3. Dementia (cognitive decline interferes with a person’s ability to take care of themselves)

A recent study on Ageing and the brain showed that memory performance declines from middle age onwards. This is particularly true for recall for people with normal aging and less so for recognition. Declines in recall are also a characteristic of the memory loss seen in Alzheimer’s disease.

How Can We Protect Brain Health as We Age?

Brain aging is inevitable to some extent, but it is not uniform; it affects everyone differently based on genetics, lifestyle, and the environment. A growing body of evidence suggests that people who experience the least decline in cognition and memory share a certain healthy and active lifestyle.

Moreover, populations with extreme longevity, where a large number of people live for 100 years or more, have a few traits in common: a diet with plenty of antioxidant fruits and vegetables, healthy grains, and protein, as well as regular physical activity, and strong social networks.

To support a healthy aging process, you need to take care of the body and mind. Here are some ways you can start practicing the longevity lifestyle today:

1. Start Exercising Your Brain Early

Once cognitive function becomes severe enough to cause dementia, it’s difficult or impossible to recover. That’s why a focus on early intervention and protecting a healthy brain, instead of

attempting an extensive repair, is so vital. Research has consistently shown that people who spend more time in mentally stimulating activities, such as reading, playing word games, or learning a new skill, have a greater likelihood of sustaining and even improving memory, processing speed, attention, and perception.

Like a muscle, the brain appears to perform better when it gets regular exercise. Mental stimulation has been shown to activate neural circuits and is associated with lower Alzheimer's risk. Educational achievements, bilingualism, or doing puzzles have all been shown to lower the risk of dementia. Memory training can also improve memory recall and help you maintain higher cognitive performance for five or more years.

2. Be Active and Eat Healthy

Studies have shown that people who get regular cardiovascular conditioning have larger parietal, temporal, and frontal brain areas, which is associated with stronger cognitive performance.

Pairing exercise with a balanced diet supports brain health and cardiovascular health. Consume a healthy brain diet by:

- Eating foods rich in omega-3 fats, like fish and nuts.
- Consuming more antioxidant-dense fruits and vegetables, like blueberries and artichokes.
- Avoiding processed foods.

Remember that these are tactics for maintaining a healthy body, as nutrition and exercise alone don't prevent the onset of disease or reverse the effects of aging.

3. Mind Your Medicine

It's important to partner with your doctor to manage your wellness. Medicines for treating hypertension and high cholesterol are associated with better brain health and longer life expectancy.

4. Master the Environment

It's also vital to create a healthy environment. Limit exposure to smoke, smog, mold, and other toxins. Avoid information overload, TV addiction, and clutter.

5. Keep a Positive Outlook

It's true what they say: optimists live longer than pessimists. And optimism can be learned. Some find a positive outlook through spirituality or harmony with nature. Practicing mindfulness, yoga, or meditation can help you get started on this track.

6. Get Social More Often

Nurturing a strong community that you can rely on for the good and the bad is essential to feeling supported and loved. Research suggests that having a large social network can positively impact how you feel, and therefore slow brain aging and preserve memory.