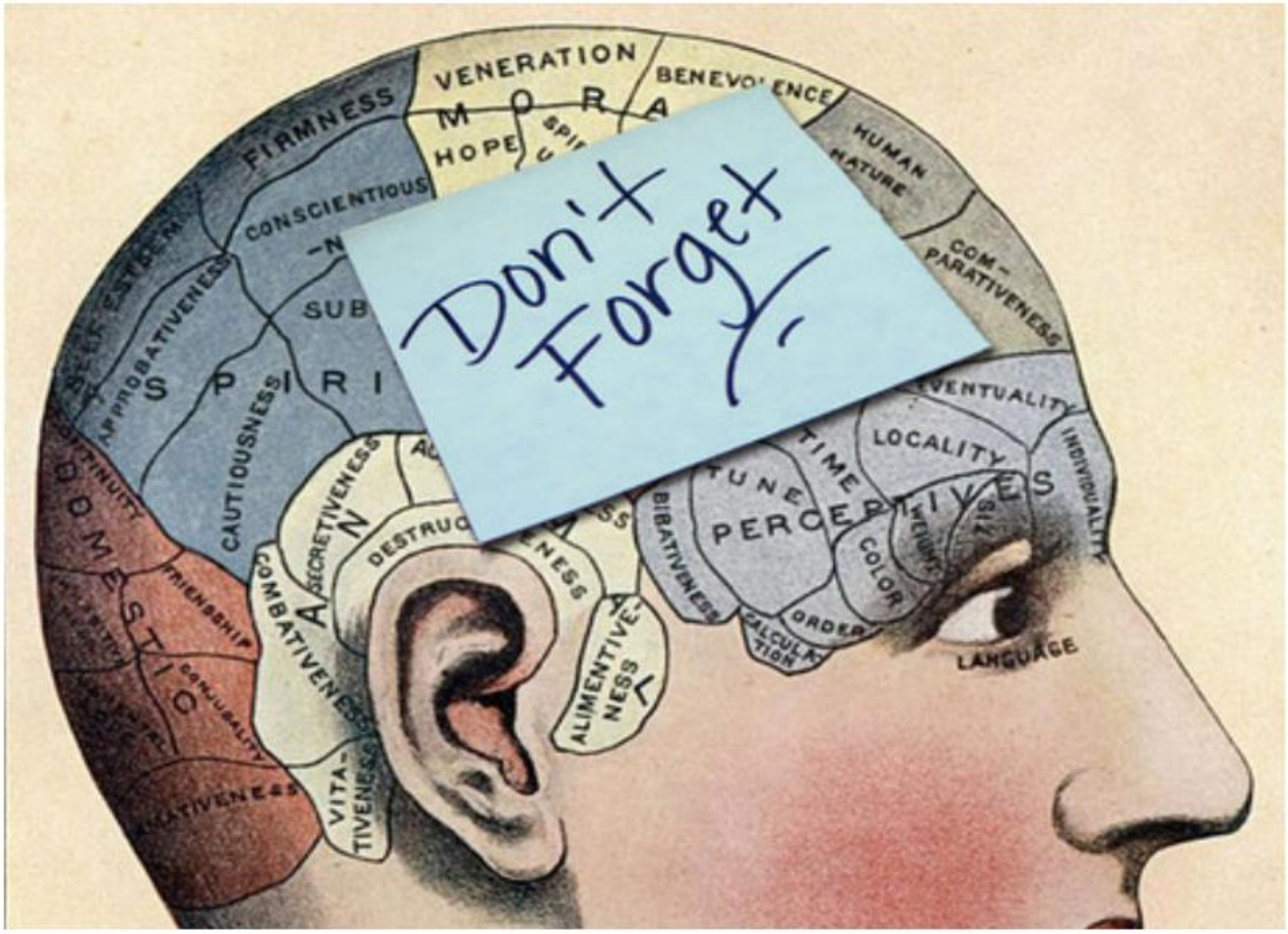
Thanks for the Memories



Jenni Adams, Education Chair, District 9
Developed by Andrew Crocker, Extension Program Specialist,
Gerontology Health, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
September, 2020

Thanks for the Memories

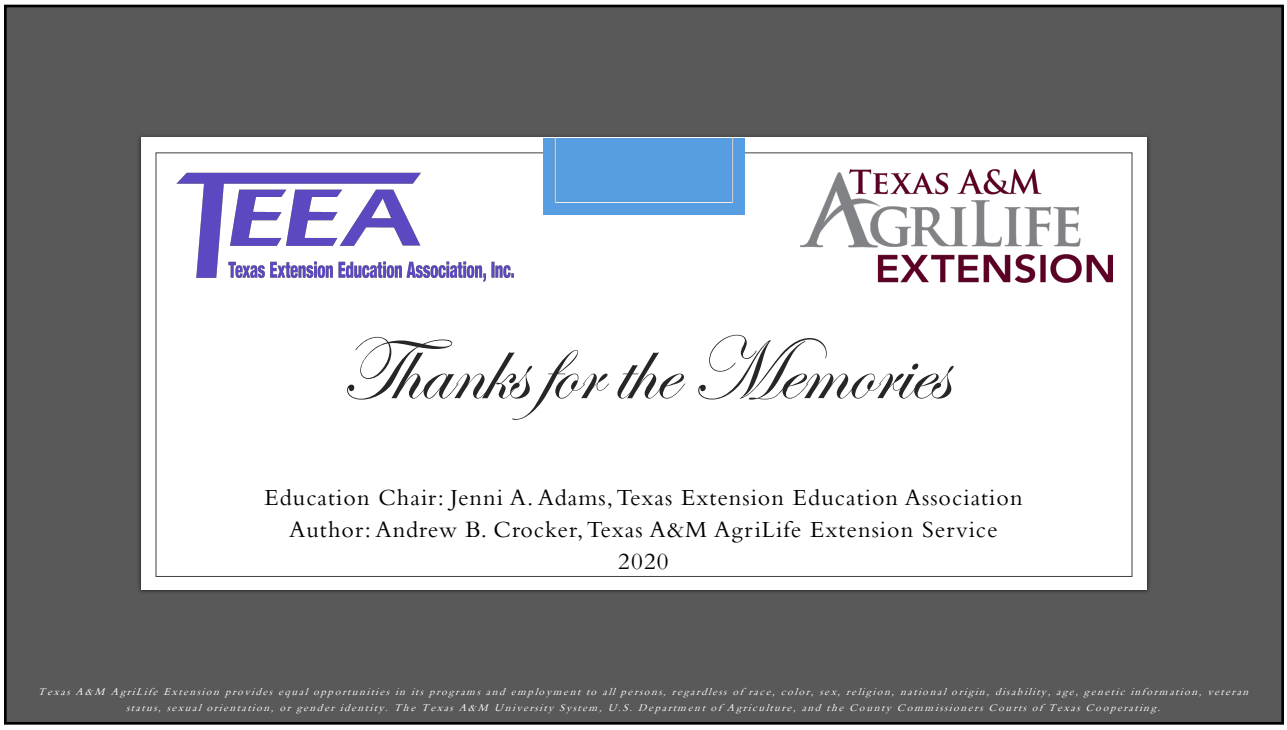
Goals and Objectives

- Goal
  - Provide information and resources related to memory function in older adults.

- Objectives
  - Discuss beliefs about aging and memory
  - Discuss brain function
  - Discuss nutrition, medications, and health conditions as factors in brain function
  - Discuss tips for memory self-efficacy

Materials (available from http://teea.tamu.edu)

- "Thanks for the Memories" PowerPoint
- "Thanks for the Memories" Handout (optional)
- "Thanks for the Memories" Evaluation
- (Optional) Resources from the National Institute on Aging
  - *Memory, Forgetfulness and Aging: What's Normal and What's Not*
    - https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/memory-forgetfulness-and-aging-whats-normal-and-whats-not
  - *Noticing Memory Problems? What to Do Next*
    - https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/noticing-memory-problems-what-do-next
  - *Understanding Memory Loss*
    - https://order.nia.nih.gov/publication/understanding-memory-loss-easy-to-read-booklet
  - *Exercise and Physical Activity*
    - https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-physical-activity



1

Thanks for the Information

- "Memory loss" is highly influenced by personal and contextual factors
  - Aging stereotypes
  - Sense of self-efficacy
- Memory complaints increase with age but do not necessarily correlate with cognitive decline
- Older adults may experience changes in the brain just as they experience other changes in the body
  - Focus/attention
  - Multi-tasking
  - Speed of recall
- Some elements of brain function remain unchanged throughout the lifespan
  - Vocabulary and reading
  - Reasoning and procedure

2

Thanks for the Brain

- 80+ billion nerve cells
- Hundreds of trillions of connections
- Nerve signals can travel (the equivalent of) 268 MPH
- May utilize up to 30% of your body's available resources
- Reaches maximum volume in early adulthood
  - New nerve cell growth, connections, and learning can continue
- Very compartmentalized and specialized
  - Use and stimulation throughout the lifespan may affect how the brain functions in later life

3

Thanks for the Nutrition

- Vary diet with lean meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy
  - Emphasis on fruits and vegetables
  - Emphasis on Omega-3 fatty acids
  - Emphasis on B Vitamins, Vitamin C, and Vitamin E
- Hydration
  - Water
  - Decaffeinated coffees and teas
  - 100% fruit juices
  - Low-fat dairy
- Try to minimize heavily processed foods that may be high in things like added sodium and sugars

4

Thanks for the Medications

- Many medications may affect brain function, concentration, and/or ability to concentrate
  - Pain medications
  - Anti-depressants
  - Antihistamines
  - Sleep aids
  - and on and on and on
- Drug-drug interactions may cause unintended side-effects
- Discuss all medications, prescription and over-the-counter, with all your health providers
- Beware "memory pills" and "miracle" cures

5

Thanks for the Health

- Memory complaints are more closely linked to affective and personality variables than objective performance
  - Stress
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
- Good health status overall is good for your brain
  - Prevent/manage chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, etc.
- Physical activity is good for your body and your brain
  - Increases the flow of blood and Oxygen
  - Affects vasculature and neurogenesis

6

Thanks for Talking to your Health Provider

- Be open and honest with your health provider about all your health concerns
- Talk to your health provider when memory concerns or issues begin to interfere with independent function
  - Forgetting how to carry out everyday tasks: handling money, paying bills, etc.
  - Decline in ability to plan and/or organize
  - Getting lost in familiar places
  - Not able to recall the names of loved ones

7

Thanks for the Tips & Tricks

- Confidence
- Establish a routine
- Minimize distractions
- Social interaction
- Physical activity
- Relax and reflect
- Train your brain
  - Memory
    - Organization, visualization, and association
  - Reasoning
    - Finding patterns in letters, numbers, and series
  - Speed of processing
    - Identifying objects quickly
    - Recalling information

8

Thanks for the Additional Resources

- *Memory, Forgetfulness and Aging: What's Normal and What's Not*
  - https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/memory-forgetfulness-and-aging-whats-normal-and-whats-not
- *Noticing Memory Problems? What to Do Next*
  - https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/noticing-memory-problems-what-do-next
- *Understanding Memory Loss*
  - https://order.nia.nih.gov/publication/understanding-memory-loss-easy-to-read-booklet
- *Exercise and Physical Activity*
  - https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-physical-activity

9

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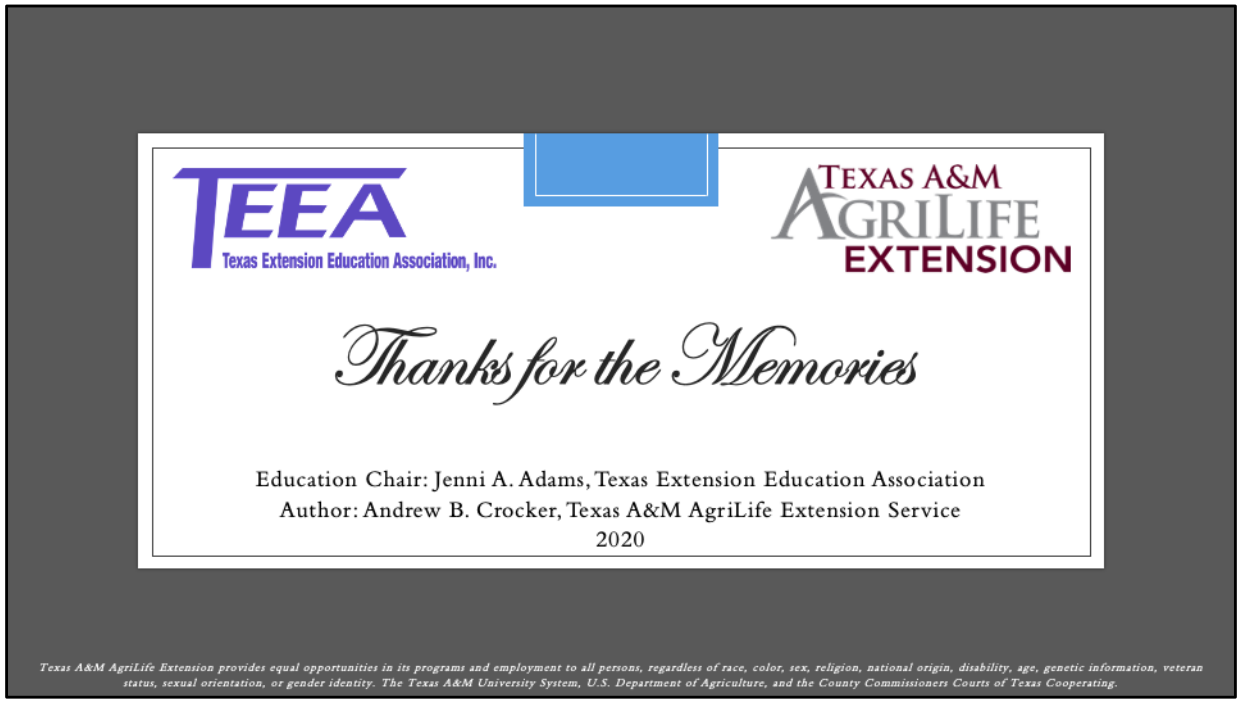
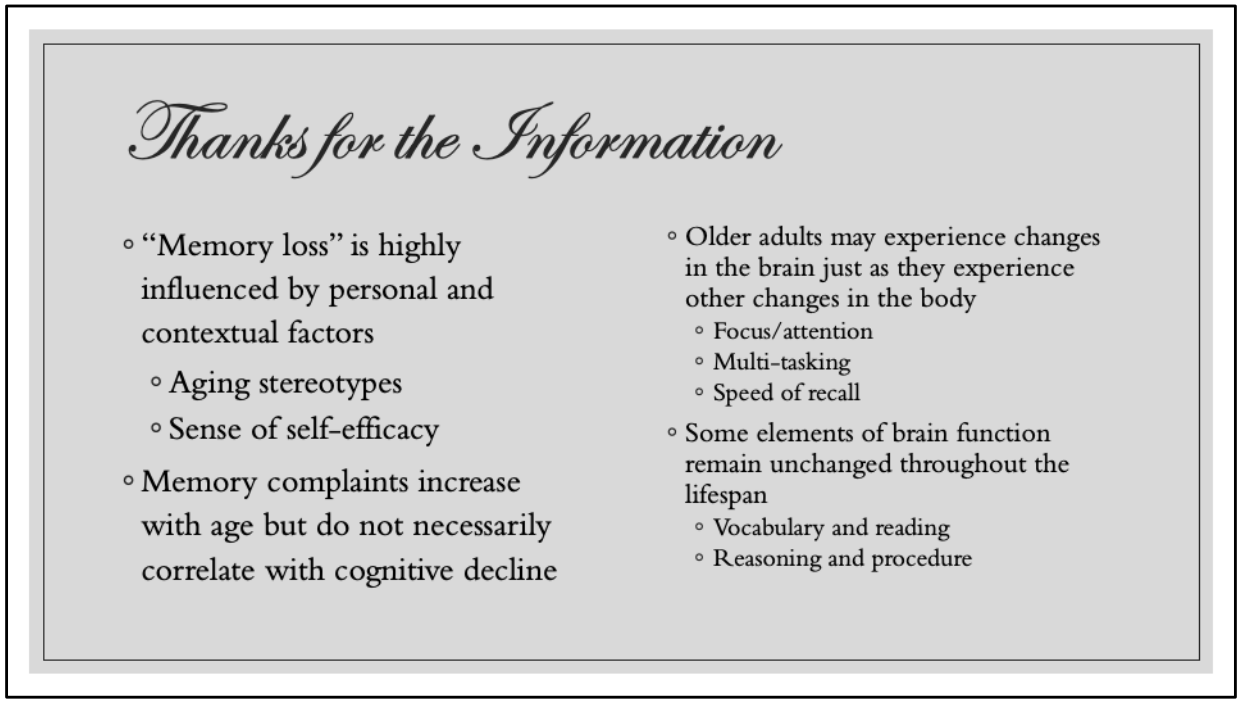
Thanks for the Questions

10



Misplacing your keys or wallet. Forgetting someone's name or what you went in a room to do. All common experiences. But, for older adults, these experiences often cause worry that "something else" might be going on – developing Alzheimer's disease or some other form of dementia may be a common fear for older adults.

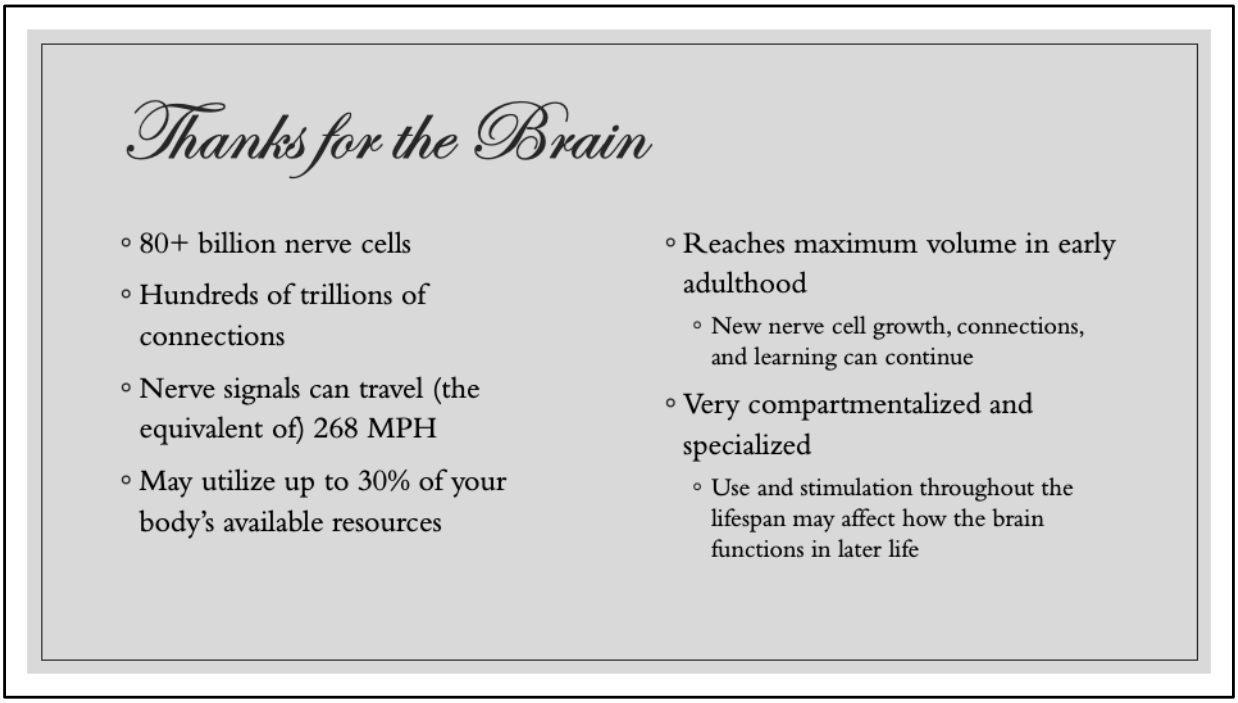
However, for the human brain, there is no such thing as "over the hill." Our brains may change over time; but, it can be helpful to distinguish common changes from those that require medical attention. Research suggests that the combination of good nutrition, physical activity, and mental and social engagement may help you and your brain stay healthy.



Self-evaluation of memory function may be one of the most important aspects of memory in older adults. Research on memory has started to focus less on the mechanics of the brain and more on understanding how negative stereotypes older adults may hold about aging and memory function affect memory performance. Studies have shown that memory complaints are more closely linked to personality variables, such as stress, anxiety, and/or depression, than objective memory performance. Strong stereotypes and actual deficits may combine to reduce self-efficacy leading to further deterioration of memory skills. As a consequence, older adults become victims to their own low expectations.

Some changes in the ability to think are considered a "normal" part of the aging process. These age-related declines most commonly include overall slowness in thinking and difficulties in sustaining attention, multitasking, holding information in mind, and word-finding. Research indicates that age-related changes in brain structures, such as decreased volume in certain areas of the brain, contribute to some of the thinking changes.

However, not all thinking abilities decline with age. In fact, vocabulary, reading, and verbal reasoning remain unchanged or even improve throughout the lifespan.

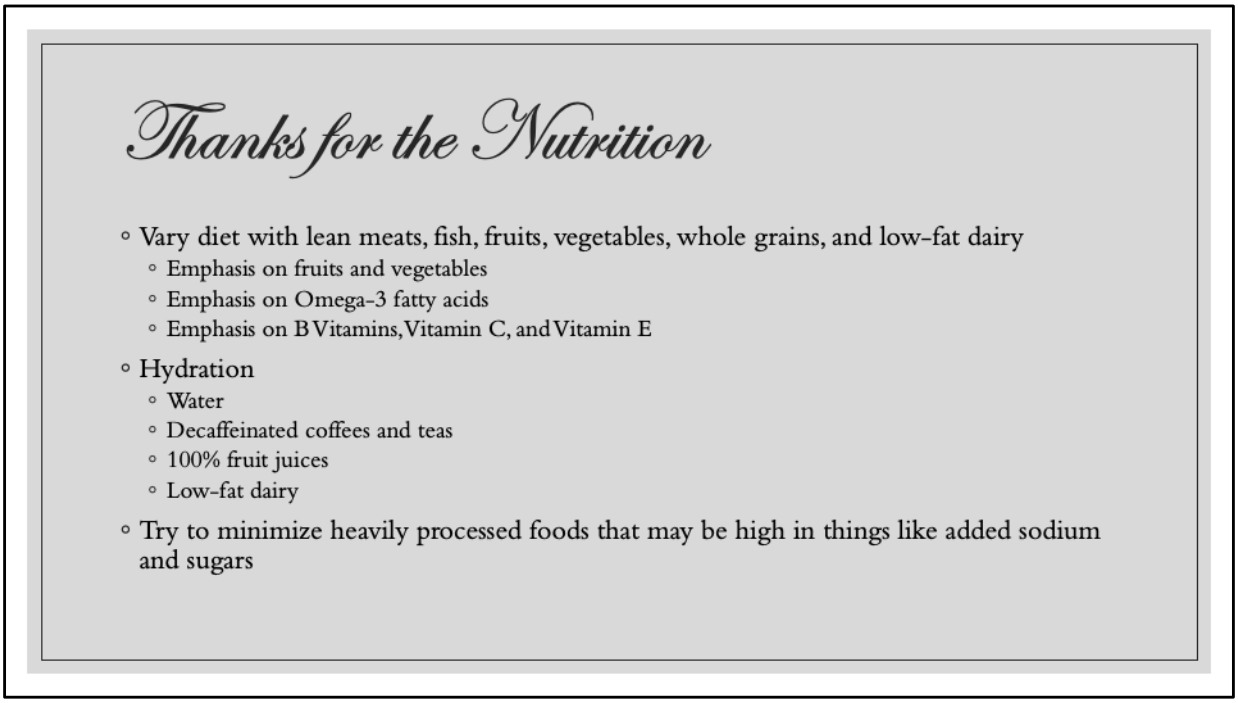


Your brain controls all aspects of your being, whether you consciously think about an action, like purposefully picking something up off a table, or unconsciously do something, like blinking or breathing or swallowing. The swirl of electrical and chemical impulses that make up your nervous system all have their beginning and end with your brain.

To understand what is happening on the outside, we have to look at what is happening on the inside. Although new nerve cells in the brain, known as neurons, develop throughout our lives, our brains reach their maximum size in our early twenties and then begin to slowly decline in volume. Additionally, blood flow to the brain also decreases over time. The good news is that many studies have shown that the brain remains capable of regrowth and of learning and retaining new facts and skills throughout life, especially for people who get regular physical activity and frequent intellectual stimulation.

Our brains are also very compartmentalized. We think of it as one "thing" – like a pot of stew is one "thing." But a stew is actually many things: liquid, probably some type of meat, a variety of vegetables (or other leftovers you needed to get out of your fridge), seasonings, etc., that go into making what we think of as a stew. The same

goes for your brain: thinking and reasoning occur in one area, your awareness of time and space in another; things that you see and hear are sorted and stored in separate areas, things you want to say are processed in another; and so on. This compartmentalization helps us in the event of, say, a brain injury or a stroke where one area of the brain might be impacted but the rest of the brain remains functionally intact. But it can also hurt us when key areas of the brain – like the parts that help us speak or the part that helps us make rational decisions - are affected by some process but the rest of the brain is not impacted.



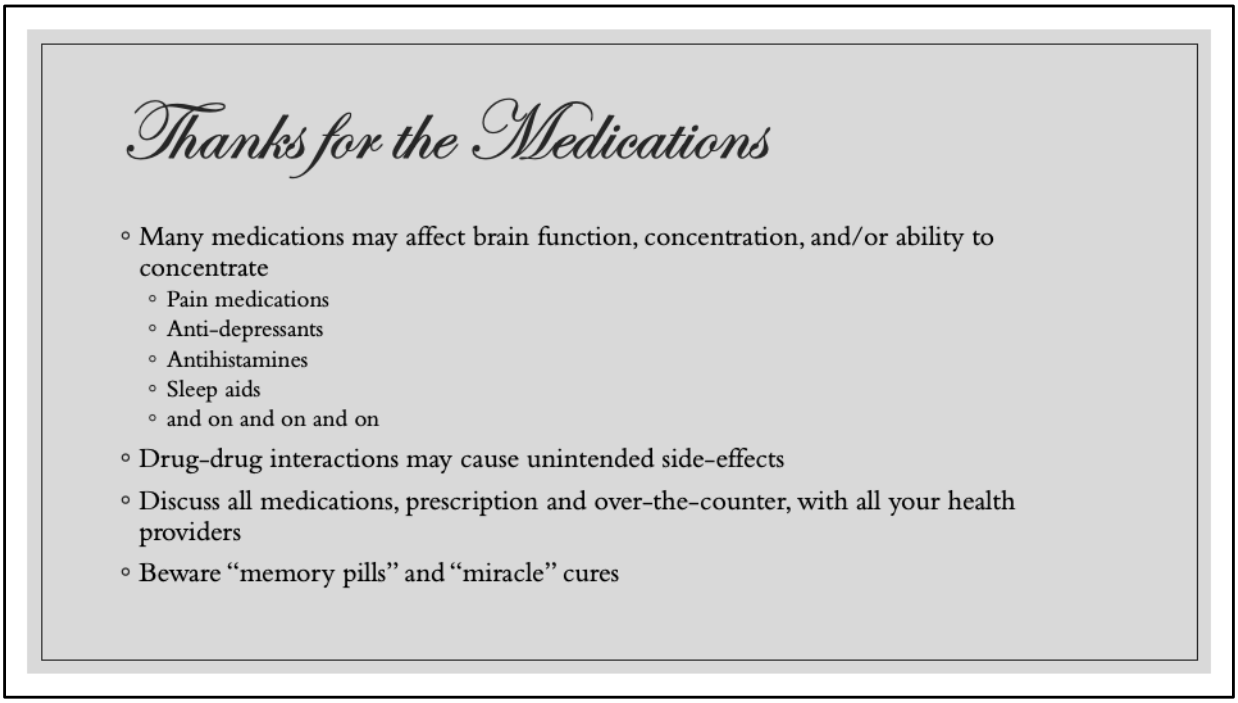
Our bodies operate in a very narrow range of "normal." We often think that if some is good then more must be better; but, the reality is our body just has to figure out how to store or get rid of any excess. When considering "fuel" for your body and brain, varying your diet with lean meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy offers the best source of nutrition. Using the guidance provided by USDA's MyPlate can help keep those portion sizes under control as well.

Studies have shown that emphasizing richly colored fruits and vegetables throughout the lifespan has positive benefits for your overall health as well as your brain health. Next time you make a salad, reach for those dark, leafy greens instead of the iceberg and throw some blueberries in there for good measure! Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fish, such as salmon, nuts, like walnuts and pecans, eggs, and avocados. Omega-3s help your cardiovascular system function better, even the blood vessels that supply your brain. B Vitamins, especially B12, help protect nerve cells and are vital to a healthy brain – you get B Vitamins from proteins such as meat, dairy, and beans. Vitamins C and E are antioxidants that help cells in the body and brain prevent and repair damage done by free radicals. Almonds, spinach, and broccoli are rich in Vitamin E; Vitamin C is found in citrus fruits, tomatoes, and potatoes. But remember where we started on this slide: if some is good, more is not always better. If you're

worried about meeting your body's nutrient needs, please consult with your health provider and/or a dietitian.

Do not underestimate the importance of hydration in optimal body and brain function. Our bodies are mostly water and we rely on a steady intake of fluids to help maintain balance. Appropriate hydration is important for blood flow, body temperature regulation, and helping to cushion your brain, among other key functions. Our best sources of fluids are water, decaffeinated beverages, 100% fruit juices, and low-fat dairy. MyPlate can help determine appropriate amounts of fluid intake each day based on your age and activity level. If you have trouble getting the right amount of fluids each day, talk to your health provider or a dietitian about things you can try to increase your fluid levels.

Finally, try to avoid heavily processed foods which can often be high in added sodium and/or sugars. But remember to distinguished between packaged and processed. Frozen blueberries (packaged) might be the best way to get "fresh" fruit into your diet and certainly a better alternative than a blueberry toaster pastry (processed).

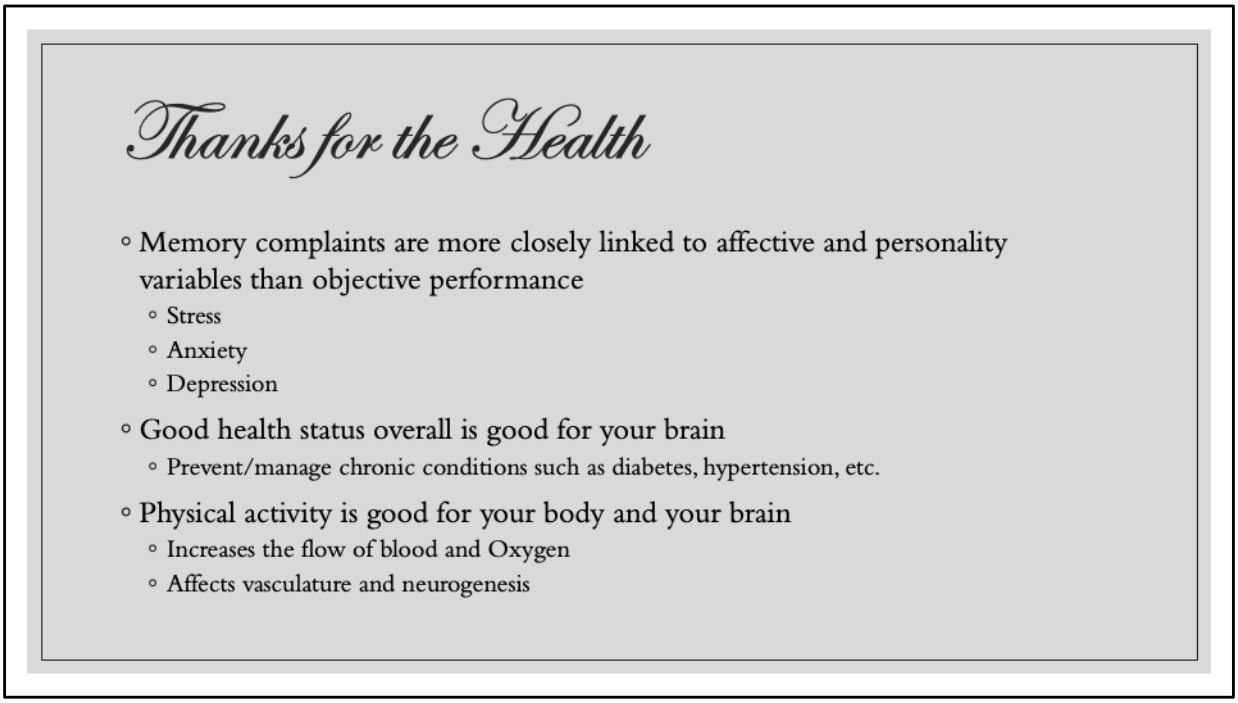


Medications, whether prescription or over-the-counter, play a key role in helping keep us healthy; but they may also cause side-effects, both known and unknown. It's important to have open, honest communication with your health provider about your medication compliance and also how your medications make you feel. You know your body best and when something feels "off," especially after starting a new medication, talk to your health provider or pharmacist about whether this is to be expected and what, if anything, you can do about it. You should never just stop taking a medication without doing it in consultation with your health provider.

In general, any type of medication that suppresses pain, induces sleep, or is meant to help with relaxation may impact your ability to concentrate and, subsequently, remember. Additionally, taking more than one medication increases the risk of an unintended side-effect. Company A does a really good job in trying to determine the likely side-effects of drug A; Company B likewise for drug B. But it's hard to determine how drug A and drug B, when taken together, will affect someone. Again, it's important to not take "funny feelings" or changes for granted – talk to your health provider about anything you experience when taking medications. If you do not see your provider regularly, write things down so that you can report them on your next visit. It also might be a good practice to talk about all the things you take, both

prescription and non-prescription, with your health provider at every visit.

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is, right? Except when it's on TV. In the middle of the night. Using words like "revolutionary" and "break through" and "clinically proven." Do not let fear "bully" you into buying a product that claims to resolve memory issues. Do your homework. Check the National Institutes of Health to see if there have really been any clinical studies – products may claim "clinical" results but these are not the same type of clinical trials that prescription medications go through. Check the Federal Trade Commission to see if there are any actions against the product/company for making false claims. Talk to your health provider to make sure that the product or any of its ingredients are safe for you, for your existing conditions, and in conjunction with your existing medications. Just because something is "safe" to take without a prescription does not mean that it is safe for you.

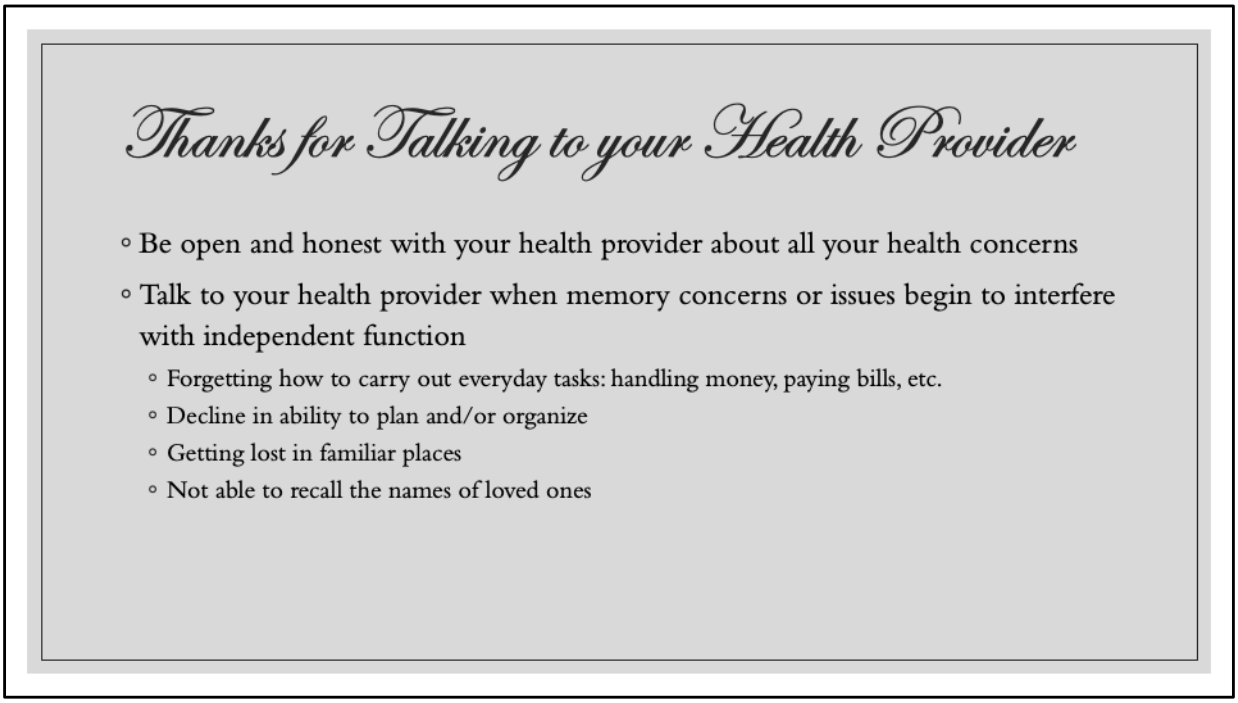


As we mentioned before, research continues to show that "poor" memory performance is more closely linked to stress, anxiety, and/or depression than objective performance in day-to-day life or cognitive skills testing. And when you couple that with a negative self-image or stereotype about aging and memory function, the issue worsens. Negative self-image might also extend to other areas of health as well: I can't do anything about my diabetes, I can't exercise, I don't want to bother my health provider about my concerns. Try to adopt a more positive tone/stance: what can you do? Maybe you can't run a marathon, but can you take a few steps? Maybe you can't cure your diabetes, but can you make healthier, more appropriately sized food choices?

Regarding stress, anxiety, and depression specifically, talk to your health provider about issues you may be facing and what you can do about them. There may be very effective treatments for the mental or emotional health condition you're facing. When we have a sneeze or a cough or a fever we don't really hesitate talking it over with our health provider. But when we feel sad or anxious or nervous, we don't want to discuss it even though treatments for some of these issues are readily available and very effective. It just takes starting the conversation with your health provider.

Also, work with your health provider to help prevent or manage chronic conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, etc. In addition to being good for your overall health, these conditions in particular may directly impact your brain health and function. Again, if you think you cannot do anything about these conditions, you're probably right; but, if you think you can do something about these conditions, you're also probably right.

Physical activity – 30 minutes per day, most days of the week – is good for your overall health. It increases blood flow and Oxygenation to your brain and can help create new nerve cells. If you are not currently physically active or it has been a while, talk to your health provider about an entry-level physical activity routine. There are also a variety of resources available through the National Institute on Aging and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service to help get you started.

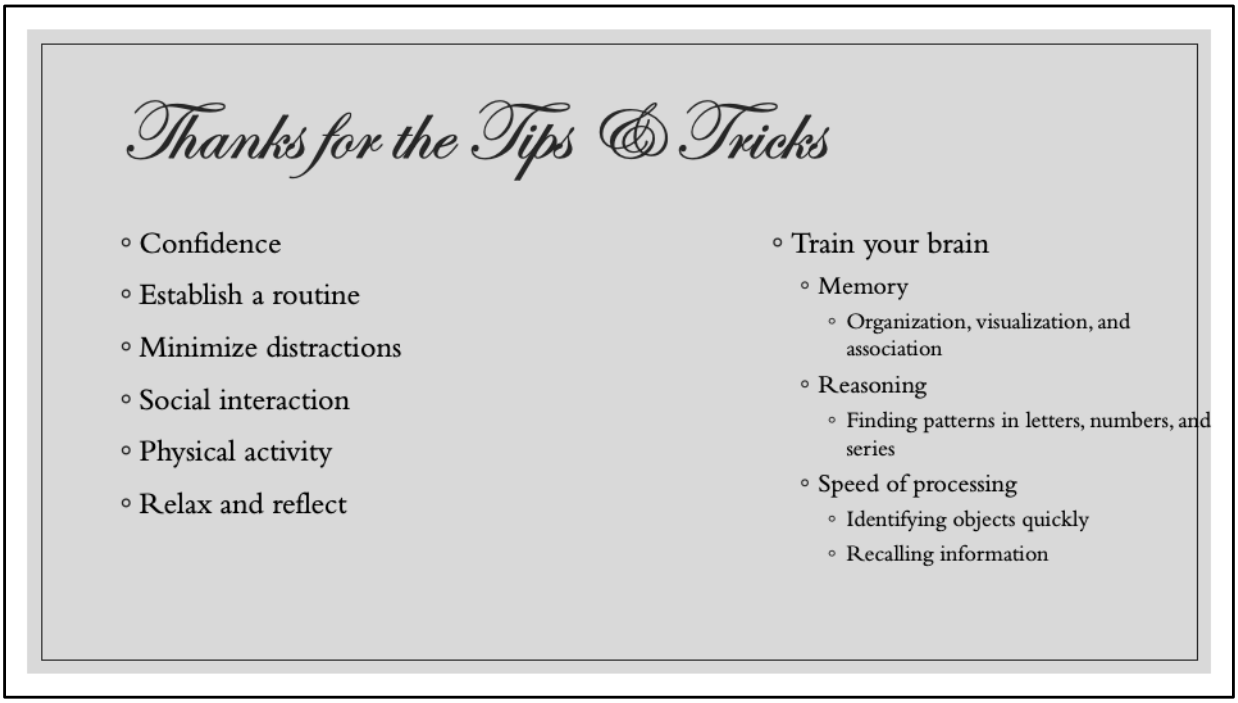


Keeping up the theme of communication with your health provider…70% of your provider's diagnosis is based on what you tell her or him. If you're not giving them complete information, they cannot make the best diagnosis. If you don't feel comfortable sharing "sensitive" information with your health provider, ask yourself why? Are you embarrassed? It's okay, swallow hard and have the conversation, ask the question. Do you think she or he is too busy to listen to your concerns? During your visit, they're "working" for you - share your concerns in detailed but succinct form…write things down if you need to and hand her/him the note. Do you not trust her or him to make a diagnosis or have a conversation? You might want to consider why you have her or him as your health provider. Whatever the case, find the courage to make a change in the level of conversation and frankness with your health provider.

With memory specifically, it's probably time to talk to your health provider when memory lapses become frequent enough or noticeable enough to concern you or a family member. If you get to that point, make an appointment to talk to your health provider about your concerns and have a thorough physical. Your health provider can assess your personal risk factors, evaluate your symptoms, rule out reversible causes of memory loss, and help you obtain appropriate care/treatment. Even if you don't

get a diagnosis, your health provider can start working with you to monitor your concerns and may be able to take some steps to prevent your small problem from becoming a larger one.

If there is something more serious going on, early diagnosis will be important to start making plans, treat/manage symptoms if possible, and, hopefully, slow decline.



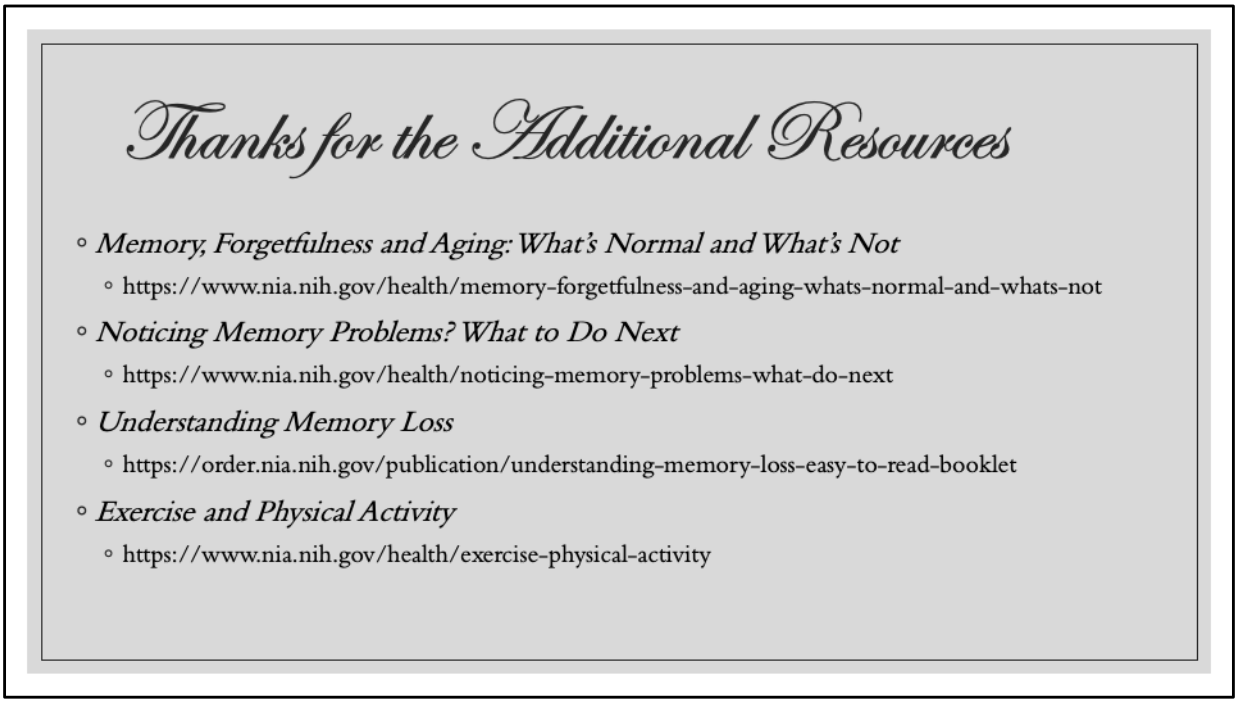
The same tips that contribute to healthy aging and physical wellness also contribute to a healthy brain/memory.

- Try to focus on what you can do rather than getting bogged down in what you cannot do. Be confident in your abilities to make changes or make a difference in your physical and mental health.
- Try to establish a routine for things that you do regularly and, especially, for things that tend to be sticking points with brain function. If you notice you forget to do a particular task regularly, try to make a habit out of something to remind you to accomplish it.
- Try to minimize distractions so you're able to focus on what is most important. When something else comes up, write it down and come back to it later but keep your focus on the task at hand.
- Try to stay engaged with family and friends. Quality social interaction can help reduce stress and keep your brain active. Find or make opportunities to participate in activities with other people.
- Try to get regular physical activity, varying activity with strengthening and endurance exercises, to help maintain physical and mental function.
- Try to relax and just let your brain work, especially when you get anxious or frustrated. Also, remember that sleep is very important for overall brain function

so if you're not sleeping well, work with your health provider to determine what might be affecting your sleep.

To keep your brain active, try to engage in activities that challenge your memory, reasoning skills, and speed of recall:

- Keep doing what you already enjoy doing…just try to find a way to make it more challenging/interesting. Maybe try teaching someone else to do what you're doing.
- Play games you're not already familiar with that involve strategy. Try crossword and other word puzzles or number puzzles such as Sudoku.
- Read newspapers, magazines, and books that challenge you. And share/discuss what you read/learned with another person.
- Get in the habit of learning new things: games, recipes, driving routes, etc. Take a course in an unfamiliar subject that interests you. The more interested and engaged your brain, the more likely you'll be able to continue learning and the greater benefits you'll experience.
- Take on a project that involves design and planning, like planning a garden or making a quilt.



The National Institutes on Aging has great resources to help understand memory issues and differentiate minor issues from potentially major problems. They also have great resources to help you establish a regular physical activity routine.

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Thanks for the Questions

Texas Extension Education Association, Inc.
Thanks for the Memories

Please take a moment to provide feedback on this program.

1. Regarding the **overall program/teaching** (rate your response by circling a number):

Statement	Scale (1= Worst, 5 = Best)
The value of the lesson was	**1** not valuable **2** **3** **4** **5** very valuable
The overall teaching was	**1** poor **2** **3** **4** **5** excellent
The teacher's knowledge of the lesson was	**1** poor **2** **3** **4** **5** excellent

2. Regarding **what you know and actions you plan to take** (circle your response):

I learned new information today. YES NO

I plan to use the information I learned today. YES NO

I feel this information helped me better understand memory. YES NO

I think I now know issues that can impact memory function. YES NO

I know how to find reliable information and resources about memory. YES NO

3. This lesson was delivered by a(n) (check only one):

_____ TEEA Member. _____ Extension Agent/Specialist _____ Other Speaker.

4. Please tell us about yourself.

I am a _____ Woman. _____ Man.

I am in District: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12**

I have been a member of TEEA for _____ years.

My age is _____ years-old.

5. Additional Comments.

Thank You For Completing This Form!