# Experts reveal multifaceted lifestyle strategies to promote brain health and delay cognitive decline



As the global population ages, concerns about cognitive decline and brain health have become increasingly prominent. Experts in neurology have provided comprehensive guidance on how individuals can promote brain health and potentially delay the onset of cognitive impairment through various lifestyle practices.

Dr Suzanne O’Sullivan, a consultant neurologist at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London, emphasises that maintaining overall bodily health is fundamental to brain health. She notes, “All of the sensible things that apply to bodily health apply to brain health.” Her clinical experience with patients suffering from degenerative brain diseases leads her to advocate for moderate exercise, healthy eating, and restful sleep as universally beneficial habits.

Smoking and alcohol consumption are significant factors affecting brain health. Professor Tom Solomon of the University of Liverpool succinctly advises, “If you want to damage your brain, smoke a lot.” Regarding alcohol, he acknowledges that moderate consumption may have some cardiovascular benefits but stresses that overall, “alcohol is harmful, especially to the brain.” Echoing this caution, Dr Faye Begeti from Oxford University Hospitals advises against habitual daily drinking, suggesting alcohol consumption only during celebrations.

Physical activity emerges as a cornerstone of brain health. Dr Richard Davenport, consultant neurologist and outgoing president of the Association of British Neurologists, highlights the interconnected benefits of exercise for psychological, metabolic, and physiological well-being. Solomon points out that many forms of dementia are related to vascular damage, which can be mitigated by exercise that supports cardiovascular health. He recommends 20–30 minutes of moderate physical activity that raises the heart rate two to three times each week, such as running, swimming, or cycling. Additionally, Begeti recommends incorporating balance and resistance exercises, especially single-leg activities, which help maintain muscle mass and reduce cognitive decline.

Dietary choices also play a significant role. The Mediterranean diet, rich in antioxidants, unsaturated fats, and omega-3 fatty acids, is particularly endorsed. Begeti advises replacing butter with olive oil and ensuring adequate intake of omega-3 through oily fish. She adds that vegans and vegetarians should consider vitamin B12 supplementation to support brain health.

Hydration and sleep hygiene are equally essential. Professor Solomon recommends drinking at least two litres of water daily to help prevent headaches and maintain brain function. Both Begeti and Davenport highlight the importance of consistent sleep patterns for brain restoration. Begeti advises anchoring the day by waking at the same time each morning and cautions against erratic sleep schedules. Davenport comments on emerging evidence that sleep helps the brain clear harmful proteins that may contribute to degenerative diseases.

Managing stress and technology use are also addressed. While acknowledging the challenges of reducing stress, Begeti cautions against excessive worry about sleep and lifestyle, as stress itself can negatively impact brain health. She recommends purposeful use of technology, advocating for setting limits on social media and communication apps to avoid distraction and promote intentional engagement. The social benefits of technology, particularly for those with limited mobility, are recognised by O’Sullivan, who notes its role in reducing social isolation.

Mental stimulation through hobbies and learning is another pillar of cognitive health. Dr Richard Restak, a neurologist and author, stresses the importance of finding a “magnificent obsession” and engaging in continuous mental challenges such as programming new vocabulary or pursuing musical instruments and language learning. These activities stimulate different brain regions and may help preserve cognitive function.

Sensory health is also a concern. Dr Davenport highlights the association between sensory impairments like deafness and vision loss with increased dementia risk due to their contribution to social isolation. He advises regular check-ups to maintain hearing and vision. He further mentions that a diminished sense of smell can be an early symptom of certain neurodegenerative diseases, such as Parkinson’s disease.

Regarding physical safety, particularly in sports, Davenport strongly supports helmet use for cycling and encourages caution with activities involving repeated head impacts, though he warns against discouraging physical play in children.

Finally, understanding and accepting the normal ageing process is important. O’Sullivan and Solomon point out that some degree of memory decline starts as early as the 30s along with normal forgetfulness, which should not be confused with dementia. Solomon states, “When I say to these patients, ‘Why have you come to see me?’, they turn their head to look at the relative who is with them, because they have no idea why they are there,” illustrating the distinction between normal memory lapses and more severe cognitive impairment.

Collectively, these recommendations from leading neurologists underline a multi-faceted approach to maintaining brain health that encompasses physical health, mental engagement, diet, hydration, sleep, stress management, and social interaction. The guidance aims to equip individuals with evidence-based strategies to promote cognitive longevity as they age.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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