

# 7 NEW BRAINY BITS: THE MOST RECENT NEWS ON BRAIN HEALTH

Research has confirmed that people of all ages—even those in their 80s—can improve cognitive function and even reduce their risk of Alzheimer’s Disease and other dementias through certain lifestyle behaviors. The brief synopses below highlight the most recent research into brain health.

## 1 A Little Walking Goes a Long Way.

Experts recommend that older adults get 150 minutes of aerobic activity per week. However, recent research shows that just 75 minutes per week of brisk walking or other aerobic exercise can result in cognitive benefits. But keep in mind, upping your aerobic exercise also brings more cognitive benefits.

## 2 Boost Your Heart-Healthy Behaviors.

Practicing good heart health can greatly reduce your risk of cognitive impairment. The American Heart Association’s Simple 7 survey measures important factors for heart health that we can modify—such as weight and smoking. A study of older adults who took the survey found that those who scored well had a 35 to 37 percent lower risk of cognitive impairment. Take the test at [www.heart.org/MyLifeCheck](http://www.heart.org/MyLifeCheck).

## 3 Dance, Dance, Dance.

Dancing regularly can improve cognition in older adults, according to one study. Study participants didn’t show any cardiovascular improvement—which suggests the benefits in cognition came from the emotional involvement or intellectual challenges of their dance class.

## 4 Make the Cocoa Connection.

A recent study found that older adults who drank two cups of cocoa a day for a month showed improved blood flow on brain scans and better scores on cognitive tests.

## 5 When Socializing, Think Big.

Research has shown that social activity is associated with better memory and other cognitive benefits, but which is better for your brain—smaller, intimate gatherings, or larger group interactions? One new study shows that although a lot of socializing of either type is associated with better cognitive performance, larger group interactions have stronger associations with better cognitive performance.

## 6 Be Better at B12.

Research suggests that as many as 43 percent of older adults may have B12 deficiencies. The bad news: low levels of this vitamin have been associated with depression, dementia, and increased confusion. Get more B12 in your diet through dairy, fish, and beef.

## 7 Challenge Yourself.

Older adults who learn a particularly challenging new skill such as photography and photo editing have significantly better cognitive performance afterwards. A year later, brain scans and cognitive tests still showed the brain benefits of taking on an intellectual challenge.

*These tips are based on academic research summarized by Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, an area of service of Mather LifeWays. Mather LifeWays is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of older adults by creating Ways to Age Well.<sup>SM</sup> Staffed by nationally recognized researchers, the Institute is an award-winning resource for research and information about wellness, aging, trends in senior living, and successful aging service innovations.*

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The Institute on Aging provides additional summaries of research on brain fitness and other age-related topics at [www.InvestigAge.com](http://www.InvestigAge.com).