

Column: Raising awareness for Alzheimer's, prevention, treatment, and hope

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As we recognize Alzheimer's Awareness Month in November, it's a timely reminder to consider how we can protect and support brain health throughout life.

Alzheimer's disease currently affects over 6 million Americans and is among the top causes of death in the United States. With no known cure, it is essential to explore and embrace strategies that might reduce the risk of developing the disease and to support those living with Alzheimer's.

FACTORS

Lifestyle factors play a central role in brain health. Physical activity, a heart-healthy diet, and consistent cognitive engagement have all shown promise in reducing Alzheimer's risk. Regular exercise can improve blood flow to the brain and reduce inflammation, both of which are crucial for long-term cognitive health. Likewise, a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats can help support brain function, protect against oxidative stress, and improve overall well-being.

Staying mentally and socially active is another key factor. Research has shown that regularly challenging the brain — whether through learning, reading, or social activities — can build “cognitive reserve,” the brain’s ability to adapt and compensate in response to changes. Playing games, whether traditional board games or digital puzzles, can be one enjoyable and effective way to engage the brain. Such activities can enhance memory, attention, and problem-solving skills, all of which are affected as Alzheimer’s progresses.

Studies published in *Alzheimer’s & Dementia* have suggested that seniors who participate in mental challenges may experience slower cognitive decline, particularly when these activities are done with others.

BROADER STRATEGY

Yet, games are just one piece of the broader strategy to protect brain health. Social interaction itself has been linked to lower risks of cognitive impairment. Whether through volunteering, joining clubs, or simply maintaining friendships, these connections offer emotional support and mental stimulation. Physical and social activities, combined with a balanced diet and regular checkups, can help create a robust foundation for lifelong brain health.

This Alzheimer’s Awareness Month let’s advocate for a holistic approach to prevention — one that incorporates physical, mental, and social elements to support cognitive health.

While there are no guaranteed ways to prevent Alzheimer’s, developing a proactive plan with your provider can foster resilience and well-being. Raising awareness about these habits can encourage more people to protect their cognitive health and provide hope for a future where Alzheimer’s disease has less impact on our communities.

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