



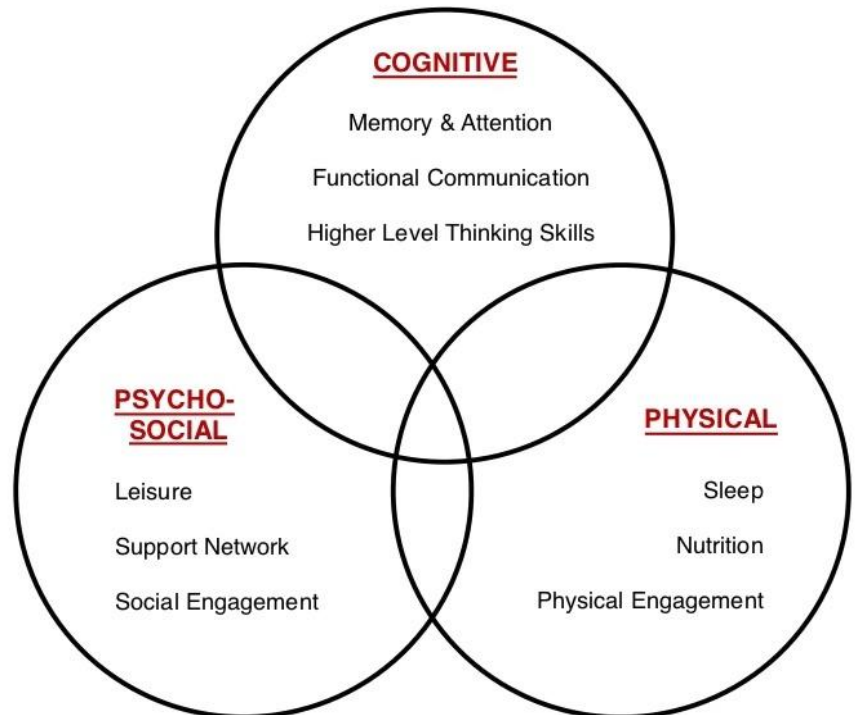
# Healthy Aging

## What is “Healthy” Aging?

As we age, our bodies and minds change in ways that are healthy and to be expected. Two main parts of healthy aging involve good quality of life and strong self-direction, which are supported by good *cognitive*, *psychosocial*, and *physical health* (see example right).

Pillars of brain health everyone should work on:

- Overall physical/general health
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Physical activity
- Cognitive activity
- Socialization
- Ongoing plan to stay healthy and mobile



## Common Characteristics of Healthy Aging

As we age, some areas of our cognitive abilities that continue to grow are:

- Learning new things and forming new routines
- Memory of old events
- Vocabulary

While some areas continue to grow, other areas of our cognition may become more challenging:

- Amount of time needed to process information
- Remembering new information
- Thinking of specific words you want to say



## Possible Signs of “Unhealthy” Aging

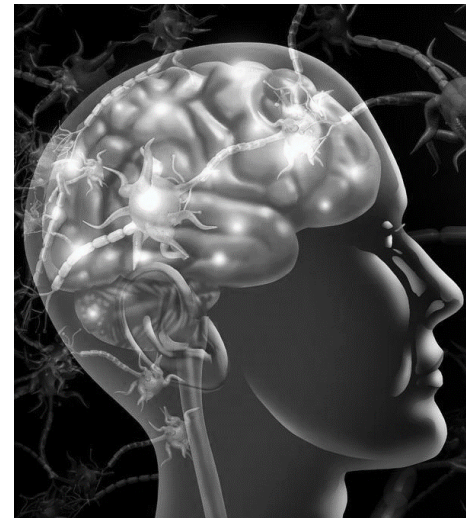
Tell a family member or consult your doctor if you continue to experience any of these changes:

- Decline in your mental health (e.g., feelings of depression or increased anxiety)
- Ongoing loss of appetite
- Unexplained weight loss
- Changes to your usual sleep habits
- Increased social isolation
- New trouble doing everyday activities
- Frequent falls

## Healthy Aging versus Alzheimer’s Disease

Alzheimer’s Disease is the most common type of Dementia. It is a slow decline in mental abilities. Alzheimer’s and Dementia may affect all seven pillars of brain health (see page 1).

Alzheimer’s occurs when there is a build-up of one specific protein (named Tau) in the brain that helps it function. This build-up puts extra pressure on the brain and slows down the flow of nutrients. These changes to the brain show up on MRI or PET scans. Difficulties with memory and language are the first signs of Alzheimer’s that people typically notice prior to diagnosis. As the disease progresses, one may experience other challenges/changes.



**A person of any age who is experiencing memory problems does not automatically have Alzheimer’s Disease.**

Below are differences between healthy aging and Alzheimer’s Disease. Many of these are dependent on factors such as overall health, family support, age, community involvement, and living environment.



**Each individual’s experience is unique and may not be limited to these listed.**

	<b>Healthy Aging</b>	<b>Alzheimer’s Disease</b>
Memory and Attention	Temporary difficulty remembering names and/or the location of common items	Little memory of familiar places, people, and new information
Functional Communication	Some trouble with remembering specific words in the moment	Overall decline in language skills and verbal speech
Orientation	Forgetting things on a shopping list or the day of the week	Decreased awareness in familiar and unfamiliar environments (e.g., getting lost on your street)
Mood/Attitudes	Sometimes experiencing fatigue and/or irritability as life slows down	Sudden drastic mood changes, irritability, depression, paranoia
Daily Activities	Completing physical tasks or using advanced technology takes longer	Requiring help with things like getting dressed, brushing teeth, preparing meals

Table adapted from Alzheimer’s Tennessee, Inc. (<https://www.alztennessee.org/>)

## **Ways to Maintain Cognitive Health**

Regular brain exercise (e.g., puzzles, language learning, reading, etc.) can help to keep an individual active. Finding a way to exercise your brain that is motivating for you is a great way to maintain cognitive health. While individual cognitive exercise is important, group environments may be extra beneficial for achieving these goals. If possible, seek out cognitive exercise groups or form your own! See your doctor regularly.

See below for information about our free weekly cognitive exercise groups and other resources.



Cognitive-Community Integration Lab  
“Active Brain, Healthy Brain”

## Resources for Next Steps

Alzheimer’s Association

<https://www.alz.org/>

Alzheimer’s Tennessee

<https://www.alztennessee.org/>

Cognitive Community Integration Lab Website

<https://cognitivecommunityintegrationlab.sites.northeastern.edu/>

[Cognitive Exercise Flyer](#)

[Cognitive Exercise Brochure](#) (free, Northeastern University weekly cognitive exercise groups)

[Cognitive Exercise Survey](#)

Current Cognitive Exercise Groups (use Dr. O’Neil-Pirozzi’s email at the bottom of this page for more information)

Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative

<https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/>

US Department of Health & Human Services

<https://www.hhs.gov/aging/healthy-aging/index.html>

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