

Cognitive Health and Older Adults

Cognitive and **Brain Health** are critical to our whole wellness. Over time, and through various life experiences, people may notice changes to this aspect of their health. These health changes can complicate identification and treatment of other conditions.



Cognitive health is the ability to think clearly, learn, and remember. It is an important component of performing everyday activities. Cognitive health is just one aspect of overall brain health.

Brain health refers to how well a person's brain functions across several areas. Other aspects of brain health include motor function (physical movement), emotional function, and tactile function (using the sense of touch).



Mental Illness, Cognition & Aging

Individuals with a history of mental illness are more likely to show signs of aging, particularly cognitive decline and loss of motor coordination, even when accounting for other physical health issues like diabetes and obesity.

Cognition in Mood Disorders

- In major depression, cognitive impairments can be severe, but are often misdiagnosed as the onset of dementia
- Cognitive deficits in mood disorders also can persist in times when symptoms are in remission

Cognition in Schizophrenia

- In some people, cognition may affect onset of psychosis and negative symptoms (e.g., inattention)
- In many, cognition is stable over time, tending to worsen after the age of 65 among some people in recovery



“Cognition oftentimes declines or decreases as we age; however, this does not mean that cognitive diseases of aging such Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias (ADRD) are inevitable or synonymous with age-related declines in cognition.”

-Dr. Crystal Glover



Changes in the Aging Brain

As a person gets older, changes occur in all parts of the body, including the brain.

Certain parts of the brain shrink, especially those important to learning and other complex mental activities

- Blood flow in the brain may decrease
- Inflammation, which occurs when the body responds to an injury or disease, may increase

These changes in the brain can affect mental function, even in healthy older people. There is growing evidence that **the brain maintains the ability to change and adapt so that people can manage new challenges and tasks as they age.**

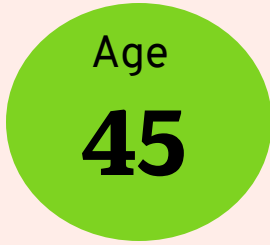


How the Aging Brain Affects Thinking

Some changes in thinking are common as people get older. For example, older adults may:

- Be slower to find words and recall names
- Find they have more problems with multitasking
- Experience mild decreases in the ability to pay attention

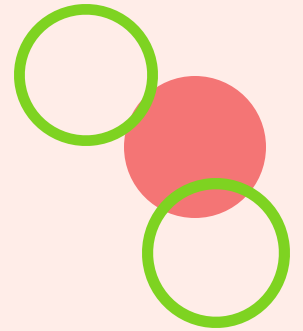
By age 45, people who reported higher levels of mental health symptoms were aging faster across all physical and behavioral markers of aging including:



- Cognitive Impairment
- Hearing & Audio Processing
- Vision & Visual Processing
- Balance & Gait Speed

▶ A growing body of scientific research suggests that the following steps are linked to cognitive health. Small changes may really add up: Making these part of your routine could help you function better.

- Take care of your physical health
- Manage high blood pressure
- Eat healthy foods
- Be physically active
- Keep your mind active
- Stay connected with social activities
- Manage stress
- Reduce risks to cognitive health



Research shows that a combination of these healthy lifestyle behaviors may also reduce the risk for Alzheimer’s disease.

Cognition & End of Life Planning

(Older individuals make) “Financial decisions ... regarding downsizing of homes, the use of savings and other retirement resources, and credit line expansion, use, and payment can have major impacts on quality of life and ADRD development in later life.”

Cognitive function is central to continually making vital life decisions.

Decisions affected by cognition also can affect other relationships, including those related to healthcare planning.

