

How to Talk to Your Doctor About Brain Health

Section 1: Before Your Doctor's Visit

Why Talk About Brain Health?

A conversation about your health isn't complete if it doesn't include your brain. That's because your brain is a crucial part of your overall health. It's just as important to know where you stand in terms of brain health as it is to know about the rest of your body, like your heart and lungs.

This guide is designed to help you start talking about brain health at your next doctor's appointment. It prompts you to think about your current mental and cognitive health, including mood changes and problems with memory. You'll learn how to prepare a list of questions and concerns, review the outcome of your doctor visit and prepare for next steps.

Even if you don't have any issues to report, brain health is still worth bringing up to your doctor now.

For more, see the article on Staying Sharp: Why Talk to Your Doctor About Brain Health.

Get Ready for Your Appointment: Make a List

What concerns do you have about brain health now? Even if you don't have any yet, it may be a good idea to bring up brain health with your doctor at your next appointment. Take a look at the following situations and check those that apply to you, if any. This will help you create a personalized question list in the next section, which you can take to your doctor visit.



Memory, Thinking and Focus

- | | |
|---|---|
| _____ Difficulty recalling names
<i>(family, friends, acquaintances, strangers)</i> | _____ Losing train of thought |
| _____ Struggling to find the right words | _____ Feeling indecisive |
| _____ Absent-mindedness <i>(example: walking into a room and forgetting why)</i> | _____ Muddy thinking or difficulty communicating |
| _____ Misplacing or losing things | _____ Feeling lost |
| _____ Forgetting dates or events <i>(examples: appointments, big events, what happened yesterday)</i> | _____ Feeling disoriented |
| _____ Problems with attention or loss of focus
<i>(examples: in conversation, while reading)</i> | _____ Trouble understanding information or following directions, or slow to respond |
| _____ Difficulty finishing tasks already started | _____ Trouble managing finances
<i>(balancing checkbook, paying bills, etc.)</i> |

AARP® Staying Sharp®



Mood and Well-being

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Feeling stressed, anxious or irritable | ☐ Reduced social interaction with others |
| ☐ Mood changes | ☐ Mental health diagnosis (<i>if applicable</i>) |
| ☐ Feeling sad or worried a lot | ☐ Sleeping too much or too little |
| ☐ Lack of enjoyment or motivation for favorite activities | ☐ Feeling tired |
| ☐ Mentally exhausted | ☐ Sleep problems (<i>falling asleep, staying asleep, waking too early</i>) |
| ☐ Feeling lonely | ☐ Sleep problem diagnosis (<i>such as sleep apnea</i>) |
| ☐ Change in personality | ☐ Stressful dreams or nightmares |



Other Factors That May Affect Brain Health

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Feeling dizzy/balance issues | ☐ More time spent sitting each day |
| ☐ Appetite changes (<i>eating too much or too little</i>) | ☐ Less daily or weekly exercise |
| ☐ Cravings (<i>sugar, fatty food, carbohydrates</i>) | ☐ Significant stress in the last year (<i>positive or negative</i>) |
| ☐ Change in use of alcohol or drugs | ☐ Change in hearing |
| ☐ Change in use of cigarettes | ☐ Worry about ability to drive safely |
| ☐ Weight gain or loss | ☐ Hormonal changes (<i>such as menopause for women, lower testosterone for men</i>) |

Notes: In addition to the above factors you selected, make a note here of others you have noticed, if any.

Section 2: During Your Doctor's Visit



Questions to Ask

If you have identified some concerns, prepare a list of questions to take with you to your appointment. Here are some suggestions to get you started. Choose the three or four that most apply to you.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ When it comes to changes in my thinking and memory, what's just normal aging? | ☐ Should I get my hearing checked? |
| ☐ Is what I'm noticing something I should worry about? | ☐ Could any factors in my life, such as stress or sleep problems, cause memory loss or other brain problems? |
| ☐ What can I do to maintain my brain health? | ☐ If I've had COVID-19, could my memory be affected? |
| ☐ Could other health or medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, diabetes or a previous head injury) affect my brain health? | ☐ If I have a brain issue related to memory, should I have a memory screen? |
| ☐ Could my medications affect my brain health? | ☐ I understand that Medicare covers a cognitive assessment in the annual wellness exam (<i>not the same as an annual physical exam</i>) if I'm age 65 or older and enrolled. Can I receive this cognitive assessment? |
| ☐ Do brain health supplements work? Should I take any? | ☐ Are other tests available? What about medications and specialists? |
| ☐ Could hormone levels play a part in brain health symptoms? | ☐ Does a family history of dementia affect my risk? |
| ☐ Am I at risk for dementia? | ☐ Are there trusted organizations that can help me learn more about brain health? |
| ☐ What is the difference between dementia and Alzheimer's disease? | |

Fill in your own additional questions here.



Know Your Health Stats

Overall health is connected to brain health. Print this and fill out these areas with your doctor's help and use this information to further your discussion on brain health with your doctor.

My Medical Conditions

(Such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, past head injury, etc.)

My Numbers

Blood pressure _____ Cholesterol _____ Glucose (*blood sugar*) _____

My Medications

Section 3: After the Visit

Next Steps

A number of issues about brain health may have come up in your doctor visit. Print this out to create your own record so you and your doctor can keep track and plan ahead.

Follow-up my doctor has requested:

Next steps for me to do:

Were all my questions answered? *(Note any here for your next appointment.)*

Date of my next doctor visit: ____/____/____