

Monterey County

# Health News

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## Lifestyle can cut Alzheimer's risk

By JANE PALMER  
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The bad news is that every 70 seconds, someone in the U.S. develops Alzheimer's disease. The good news is you can lower your odds of being one of them.

"There are no guarantees in this game, but by addressing lifestyle factors such as diet and exercise, you can decrease your risk of getting Alzheimer's," said Dr. Richard Restak, Clinical Professor of Neurology at George Washington Hospital in Washington, D.C.

In Restak's book, "Think Smart," he

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## Tips

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lays out the key points of his "optimal brain health" plan, aimed at keeping a "healthy functional brain" into old age. The same recommendations are given by the Alzheimer's Association for people diagnosed with the disease.

### Eat a healthy diet

"What's good for your heart is good for your brain," said Restak. And that, he said, means cutting out the saturated and trans fats in your diet and eating lots of fruit and vegetables.

A study published in the Journal of American Medical Association supports him. The study found that a diet that includes lots of vegetables, fruits, fish and whole grains and that is light on red meat may protect people from dementia, as well as provide cardiovascular and cancer benefits.

"In particular, obesity has been shown to be associated with increased incidence of dementia," said Restak.

The treatment he recommends is a low-calorie diet. Such diets, which have been associated with longevity, are also associated with brain health, said Restak.

And if you want to be really proactive, said Sherry Williams, regional director of the Alzheimer's Association, "Don't drink, don't smoke, and don't take recreational drugs."

### Exercise regularly

As good as it is for the body, exercise is even better for the brain.

But that doesn't have to mean pounding it out on a treadmill for an hour a day or pumping iron in the gym. A gentle 40-minute walk three times a week should do it, said Restak. Williams recommends a pleasant 30-minute daily stroll.

"Walking a mile or two three or four times a week doesn't seem to be a big deal, but it is a big deal in terms of keeping the brain sharp," said Restak.

### Get plenty of sleep

Sleep, Restak said, is one of the key components of a healthy, functioning brain.

"A tomato stores energy from the sun in the day, and

at night, it uses that energy to grow," said Restak. "The same thing is going on in the brain."

Night is when the brain stores and organizes the information it has absorbed in the day, Restak said. If it doesn't get the chance to do this, memory and the ability to process information suffers.

### Exercising the brain

"Use it or lose it" applies as much to the brain as to the body, said Restak. And he recommends engaging in "mental aerobics," specific exercises to improve memory.

"Learning words and doing crosswords is something that we suggest," said Williams. The Monterey chapter of the Alzheimer's Association holds "Maintain Your Brain" classes where people with memory concerns or who are diagnosed with Alzheimer's can learn the skills to keep their brain active.

The options, said Restak and Williams, are numerous, from adult Lego kits to the Sudoku puzzle in the daily paper.

### Active social life

"Take a book club," said Restak. "When you read a book, you get a benefit. But if you go to a book club and discuss the book, you multiply that benefit five or six times."

Socializing, said Restak, means your brain is engaged more than when you are on your own.

"Become a volunteer, take a class, join a support group," said Williams. The

Monterey chapter of the Alzheimer's Association provides opportunities to interact and gain support for those suffering from dementia.

Even taking all these precautions, however, some people will suffer from the memory problems associated with dementia. If this is the case, the first important step, said Dr. Jerry Ginsburg, a specialist in geriatric medicine in Salinas, is to get a full physical examination.

For information about the local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, including Maintain Your Brain classes and support groups, see [www.alz.org/norcal](http://www.alz.org/norcal).

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