

## Alternative Ways to Slow Cognitive Decline

By Lynn Allison

Healthcare experts say you can not only slow the progression of cognitive decline but improve mental function as you age. By understanding nutritional deficiencies that may affect the brain, you can identify the potential causes of cognitive deterioration and address them in a timely manner. Research has found that regular physical activity, a good diet, taking on new mental challenges, and maintaining strong social connections can help keep mental acuity sharp at any age.

Dr. David Friedman, a chiropractic neurologist, explains that the brain is responsible for orchestrating the interaction of glands, organs, muscles, and joints. “When the brain functions at an optimal level, we are able to think more clearly, remember details, solve problems, and retain memories from the past.”

Friedman, who is also a clinical nutritionist, says there are many steps we can take to improve the health of our brain and combat cognitive decline. “First and foremost, it’s important to consider your diet,” he says. “It’s best to avoid inflammatory foods like sugar, excessive alcohol, dairy, and refined carbohydrates. Eat more wild-caught fatty fish, nuts, flaxseed, avocados, blueberries, extra-virgin olive oil, and dark chocolate.”

### Evidence Increasing

Dr. Nancy Lonsdorf, M.D., named one of the nation’s most

prominent Ayurvedic doctors by the *Chicago Tribune*, tells *Health Radar* there’s growing evidence that lifestyle and environmental factors accelerate cognitive decline. Addressing these issues can keep the brain healthier, longer.

“These causes include inflammation triggered by poor diet, stress, and poor sleep habits,” reveals Lonsdorf. “Insulin resistance, prediabetes, and diabetes also exacerbate cognitive decline because excess sugar damages the brain and starves it of insulin, which is critical for optimal functioning.”

Lonsdorf adds that a lack of vitamins such as folate, thiamine, and B12 can shrink the brain, causing memory loss and reducing cognitive skills. Having vitamin levels checked regularly can help preserve brain function, she says.

Head trauma or repeated mild concussions earlier in life can also trigger poor cognitive conditions. “One of my patients was a former football player who suffered severe brain deterioration, which prevented him from functioning at his job,” says Lonsdorf. “After six months on my program, he was able to return to computer tasks that he had been unable to perform for years.”

### Blood Tests Are Crucial

Lonsdorf recommends getting comprehensive blood tests and working with a trained healthcare professional so you can optimize mental performance and keep your brain sharper, longer.

Supplements can also help slow cognitive decline. Here are a few examples:

**Phosphatidylserine.** Friedman says this nutrient protects brain cells, but the levels in our bodies decline with age. Several studies show that taking this supplement helps improve cognitive ability, and may even aid in the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease. In addition to taking a supplement, you can also increase your intake of phosphatidylserine by eating foods such as fatty fish, white beans, egg yolks, chicken, beef, and soy.

**Acetyl-L-carnitine.** Most of the cells in the human body contain carnitine, which is an amino acid derivative that transports fatty acids into cells to be processed for energy, says Friedman. The body converts carnitine to acetyl-L-carnitine, which is more easily absorbed from the gut, and readily crosses the blood-brain barrier. As a supplement, acetyl-L-carnitine has been successfully used for age-related memory loss, depression, and Alzheimer’s disease. You can also get carnitine by eating meat.

**Bacopa monnieri.** Both Friedman and Lonsdorf endorse this herb to prevent cognitive decline. It has been used for centuries in Ayurvedic medicine for improving brain function and memory. In addition, there is evidence that bacopa has antioxidant properties and contains compounds called bacosides, which enhance the communication functions of brain chemicals. □