

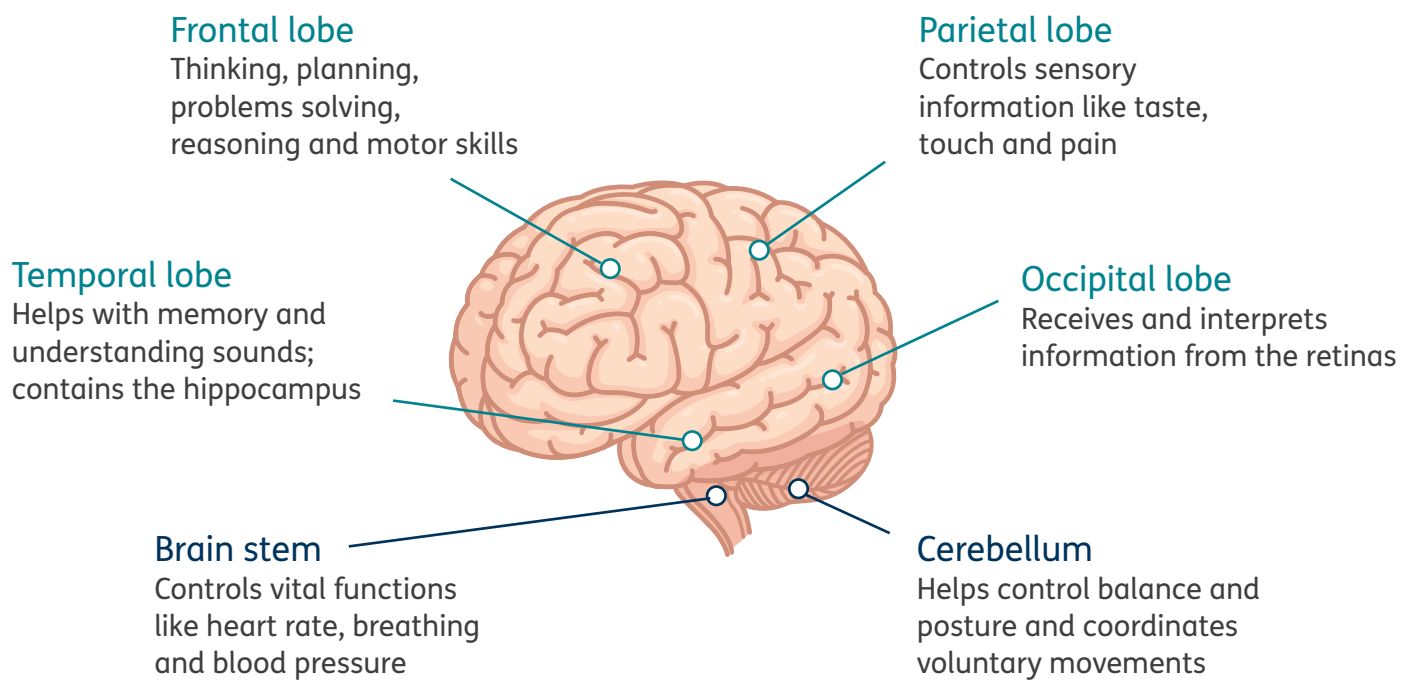
Battling the aging brain

Similar to other parts of the body, the human brain tends to become less agile as people get older. Learn about the changes you can expect and how to keep your brain healthy.

Parts of the brain

The brain is often described as the most complex organ in the body. It's responsible for thoughts, feelings, memories, emotions and behavior. It is made up of several different parts—they all work together but each piece plays its own role.¹

The cerebrum is the largest part of the brain. It can be divided into four lobes:²



The brain is connected to the rest of the body by a complicated system of nerves. Nerve cells, also called neurons, communicate with one another to send signals all over the body. Neurons communicate with one another via synapses; these allow each brain cell to connect to tens of thousands of other brain cells.

The aging brain: What's normal and what's not?

Some brain changes are a normal part of aging, but others are not normal.

Normal age-related changes ²	Abnormal age-related changes ³
Small declines in memory	Being unable to remember recent events
Slower processing speed	Forgetting how to use common objects or words
Increased reaction time	Getting lost in familiar locations
Decrease in speed of learning	Being unable to follow directions
Difficulty doing more than one task at a time	Neglecting safety, hygiene and nutrition
Difficulty ignoring distractions	Decline in the ability to socialize

If you or someone you love notice any signs or symptoms of dementia, it's important to talk to your doctor right away.

Help keep your brain healthy

There are many things you can do to keep your brain working its best.

Train your brain⁵

Challenging your mind may have short- and long-term benefits for your brain, helping reduce your risk of dementia and cognitive decline.

How can you train your brain?

- All kinds of puzzles can give your brain a workout
- Learn new things
- Do things differently than you normally do
- Take on a new project that involves planning and design

Stay active⁶

Exercise may play a role in decreasing the risk of age-related cognitive decline. It may also increase blood flow to the brain.

How much is enough? Aim to get about 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. **Remember:** Talk to your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise program.

Eat brain-friendly foods⁷

The Mediterranean diet may help reduce the risk of dementia. It consists of:

- Focusing on fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains
- Using healthy fats instead of unhealthy fats
- Limiting red meat
- Using herbs instead of salt
- Eating fish and poultry at least twice per week

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Help keep your brain healthy (continued)

There are many things you can do to keep your brain working its best.

Connect with others⁵

Remaining socially active may help support brain health and possibly delay the onset of dementia. It may also reduce your risk for depression.

- Volunteer
- Call or email old friends regularly
- Join a social-interest club
- Use social networking sites
- Take a group class
- Go to public places
- Make a weekly date with friends

If being social doesn't come naturally, set a goal to do one activity each day that allows you to talk to others.

Get enough sleep^{8, 9}

Your brain needs regular, high-quality sleep to function at its best. A lack of sleep makes it difficult to think clearly, solve problems and store and recall memories.

Follow these tips for better sleep

- Get on a schedule to keep your body on a routine
- Create calming bedtime rituals
- Keep naps short and early

Memory aids³

Remember, some memory loss is common as you age. There are a few things to help you make the most of the memory you have left.

- Keep a to-do list with details of your priorities
- Create a routine for important things so you don't forget
- Get creative when learning new things and making memories

Notes

References

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This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.

