

Maintaining Your Brain Health

(NAPSA)—Approximately one out of four individuals over the age of 65 potentially has mild memory loss or cognitive impairment, which is now known to greatly increase the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and related disorders (ADRD).

Early assessment, physicians say, can provide reassurance for the vast majority of people that they're experiencing normal, healthy aging. There's no cure for ADRD as yet, but care strategies exist that can slow the progression of dementing illnesses to maintain quality of life, reduce long-term institutionalization and cut related health care costs.

The Condition

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of mental decline or dementia, accounting for 60 to 80 percent of cases, and occurs due to changes in the brain. Though the root cause is unclear, these changes include lower levels of neurotransmitters—chemical messengers that help brain cells work properly. By age 85, it's estimated that at least 35 out of 100 people have some form of dementia.

Identify Your Risks

The first step in maintaining your brain health is to know your risk factors for diseases and conditions known to impair cognition—namely ADRD. Despite the fact that certain risk factors such as age, genetic predispositions and family history cannot be changed, there are many risk factors that you can identify and manage by choosing a healthy lifestyle and using appropriate risk-reducing treatments. Risk factors for ADRD include but are not limited to:

- Stroke
- Diabetes
- Heart diseases
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Head injury, especially with loss of consciousness.

Additional risks include:

- Obesity
- Severe estrogen deficiency



Early assessment for Alzheimer's disease can reassure the vast majority of people that they're aging normally.

- Severe testosterone deficiency
- Certain cancer treatments
- Alcohol or chemical dependency
- Regular tobacco use now or in the past
- Unhealthy diet
- Lack of mental and physical exercise
- History of depression
- Stress.

The Program

The Orange County Vital Aging Program is considered a prototype of what a community-based brain health program might look like.

The program promotes long-term brain health through education, risk factor management and early intervention against medical conditions that impair memory. It's supported by a grant to Hoag Neurosciences Institute from UniHealth Foundation, a nonprofit philanthropic organization whose mission is to support and facilitate activities that significantly improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities within its service area.

Assess Yourself

The Orange County Vital Aging Program recommends a three-step process:

- 1) Register online;
- 2) Take an in-person assessment; and
- 3) Repeat in one year.

The self-assessment tools and more information can be found at www.OCVitalAging.org/brain.