

# BRAIN HEALTH IN AGING - WORKSHEET -

The health practices below may promote overall brain health.  
This worksheet is meant for Veterans and Providers to review collaboratively.

- Eat a healthy diet**, drink enough fluids, and avoid fast or processed foods
- Improve sleep** quality and quantity; maintain a consistent sleep schedule
- Exercise**, such as walk 30-minutes per day, 3 times per week  
*\*Discuss with a Provider what activities are safe for you*
- Stay mentally active** through reading, doing puzzles, volunteer work, etc.
- Increase social connections** to prevent loneliness and isolation
- Decrease stress** levels and seek help to improve stress management skills  
*if needed*
- Limit alcohol** use OR stop drinking alcohol (circle one)
- Get vision and hearing checked** regularly; wear glasses and/or hearing aids
- Monitor your blood pressure** and report changes to your Primary Care Provider
- Review your medications** with your Provider or Pharmacist for negative effects on your thinking abilities
- Take your medications** as prescribed (e.g., for diabetes, hypertension, thyroid disorders)
- Seek help** from a Mental Health Provider for depression, anxiety, PTSD symptoms or other mental health concerns.

Notes:

**IMPORTANT:** Talk to your doctor if you experience changes in your thinking skills that do not improve or get worse.



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# What Matters Most to Me?

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## Because of these values, I would like to achieve these brain health goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Steps I can take to move toward my goals are these:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Resources that might help me include:

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# Clinician Tips for Completing the *Brain Health in Aging Worksheet* with a Veteran

Practices that support a healthy brain often require a patient to modify their lifestyle and health behaviors. These changes can be hard, but studies show that making changes and maintaining them is most successful when it is driven by the individual themselves.

Principles of Motivational Interviewing may be useful in this process.

## **Collaborate with patients to complete the handout:**

- Begin by asking the patient “What matters most to you?” Alternatives: “What do you value?” “What is important to you?” Ask the patient to write these things down on the handout.
- Ask “How might keeping your brain healthy help with [insert what matters]?”
- Using the front page of the handout, ask the patient what health practices they are interested in trying. During this conversation, help connect the health practices back to the patient’s values and goals.
- Collaborate with the patient to identify concrete steps to improve their health practices/behaviors.

## **Use these core Motivational Interviewing skills to help guide the conversation:**

- **Open ended questions**—not easily answered with a yes/no, inviting elaboration on their values and reasons for change.
  - “What matters most to you?” “Why is that important to you?”
- **Affirmations**—statements recognizing patient strengths can be useful to establish rapport and build patient confidence that change is possible.
  - “You have shown resilience in the face of change.”
- **Reflections**—statements indicating understanding and used to highlight negative change talk or emphasize positive change talk.
  - “It sounds like [your family] is really important to you.”
- **Summaries**—a recap of what has been discussed so far communicating interest and understanding.

During the conversation, listen for “change talk”. Change talk may include references to desire (I want), ability (I can), reason (It’s important), or need (I should). This can be expressed even more strongly with commitment language (I will) or active statements (I am ready).

## **If you don’t hear any “change talk” try these approaches:**

- Acknowledge the patient’s ambivalence with a reflection— “I hear that you don’t want to [health behavior] and I hear that it’s important for you to [insert value].”
- Ask permission to provide information— “You may not agree— and that’s okay— I just want to let you know that...”
- Come back to this conversation at another visit — “It doesn’t sound like you are ready to think about this behavior yet, may we discuss this at your next visit?”

