



Some Food for Thought to Nourish Memory and Brain Function

By Peggy Buchanan, director of fitness at Vista del Monte in Santa Barbara CA, a [Front Porch](#) community

November is Alzheimer's Awareness Month. According to the Alzheimer's Association, five million Americans live with the disease with that number expected to triple by 2050. But the good news is, even though it's the second most feared health condition after cancer, lifestyle choices make a difference in how the condition progresses because our brains have the ability to reorganize by forming new neural connections throughout life in a process called "neuroplasticity." Here are a few lifestyle tips to digest for preventing and/or reversing cognitive decline.

- 1. Eat Healthy Stuff:** Eat several servings of fish high in Omega 3 like salmon, albacore tuna, trout and canned sardines each week. Cut out the bad trans-fats; increase the good fats like olive oil and nuts. Reduce or eliminate alcohol and decrease your overall sugar intake. Eat like monkeys and rabbits, lots of fresh fruit and veggies high in antioxidants.
- 2. Get Moving:** Exercise increases blood flow to the brain which stimulates the production of the protein BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor) that supports the survival of neurons and the growth of new ones (brain fertilizer). By the way, BDNF in Alzheimer's patients is at a much lower level. In addition, exercise stimulates norepinephrine, a hormone that improves memory.
- 3. Go to Sleep:** Get 7-8 hours of quality sleep. Less than six is associated with a decline in brain function. Good quality sleep allows the brain to remove toxic waste that builds up during the day.
- 4. Learn New Things:** Expand your current knowledge base by studying topics you know nothing about. By building cognitive reserve, you have more to lose before you begin to show the symptoms of decline. Learning a motor skill at the same time you are doing a cognitive task is called "dual tasking" – one of the most cognitive stimulating things you can do. Learning a new dance step or routine is a good example.
- 5. Hang Out with Friends:** There is a much higher risk for dementia in individuals who experience depression from loneliness due to limited social contacts. When we enjoy the company of others via clubs, organizations and/or volunteerism, we increase the "tend and befriend" hormone, oxytocin which has the ability to

neutralize cortisol the stress hormone. High levels of cortisol damages the hippocampus which interferes with memory.

6. **Chill Out:** It's simple, the less stress you have the better your memory. Stress triggers the fight or flight response which increases adrenaline and other hormones like cortisol decreasing memory and negatively impacting mental acuity. Some activities that provide a positive impact on many health issues related to stress like high blood pressure, insomnia and depression include meditation, yoga, tai chi and support groups.
7. **Laugh a Lot:** Best of all, engage in the act of laughter. Some call it, internal jogging. Enjoying the humorous side of life increases the release of endorphins and dopamine in the brain, providing a sense of pleasure. Happiness helps the immune system function at its best. So look for every opportunity to have a good belly laugh. It turns out to be good medicine as a memory enhancer while adding to quality of life.

About Peggy Buchanan

Peggy is the coordinator of vitality/wellness programming for Front Porch and serves as the director of fitness, aquatics and physical therapy at Front Porch's [Vista del Monte](#) retirement community in Santa Barbara, Calif. Peggy has more than 30 years of experience in the health and fitness industry as an author, instructor/trainer and program developer. Her book *Movin 'n Groovin'* was awarded Amazon.com's "Best Children's Fitness Book" in 1998. She earned her master's degree from California State University, Northridge in exercise physiology and has received numerous industry certifications and awards, including two honors from the world's largest association for health and fitness professionals (IDEA).

About Front Porch

Front Porch is a not-for-profit support system for a family of companies that serve individuals and families through full-service retirement, active adult communities, affordable housing communities through CARING Housing Ministries and related management and development services. No two Front Porch communities are alike! Each community is as unique as the individuals who live in them. Front Porch active adult and full-service retirement communities offer a full range of options from independent living to skilled care, including assisted living and memory support in unique settings.

Specialized programs like the Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing, Front Porch Gallery and affiliated Centers for Spirituality and Aging support the Front Porch belief in understanding and meeting needs so that residents can live life their way. Front Porch is expanding its 'human serving' capabilities with its commitment to ['Humanly PossibleSM](#), a cultural imperative that harnesses the innovative spirit of all of its staff in an effort to do whatever is humanly possible to meet emerging needs in the communities it serves now and in the future. With innovative communities and programs that meet the changing needs of people as they age, Front Porch represents a leading-edge approach to enhance wellbeing. Front Porch is comprised of 10 full-service retirement communities in California and two adult living communities: one in Louisiana and one in Florida. Front Porch also serves individuals and families through more than 20 affordable housing communities managed by Front Porch's affiliate, CARING Housing Ministries. Front Porch, based in Glendale, Calif. and founded in 1999, is a not-for-profit organization that gives back to its residents and the communities it serves. More information is available at www.frontporch.net.