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Amplifying Life

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Brain Health

During Brain Awareness Week in March, I wrote about how the brain works. It is a super computer in our bodies that we use every day, but its work is often taken for granted. Let's learn a little about how we should care for our brain. First of all, it is never too late to change the way we take care of our brain. Begin today and take small steps to take care of your brain today, for a healthier tomorrow.

The brain depends on oxygen and adequate blood flow to work well. Twenty-five percent of the blood from every heartbeat goes to the brain. When thinking about brain health, what is good for the heart is good for the brain.

It is important to take note of how you feed your brain. Nutritious food is fuel for the brain during development and to function throughout life. Eating a brain-healthy diet can help reduce the risk or delay onset of chronic age-related brain diseases, including Alzheimer's. Having a fast food diet can lead to a fast food mind. Eating a diet high in antioxidants like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts can help prevent, slow, and repair natural cell damage.

A key component to brain and body health is to avoid poisoning your brain with drugs and alcohol, nicotine, too much caffeine, or environmental toxins – like paint fumes. Each impacts the brain and body differently. Instead, drink lots of water to keep your body hydrated!

Getting enough sleep is essential for good brain health and functioning. Lack of sleep can lead to decreased blood flow in the body. For better sleep: get some exercise early in the day, eat a well-balanced diet, and set regular bedtime and waking hours.

Physical exercise is essential to boost blood flow. Regular and vigorous exercise leads to increased blood flow. Physical exercise is one of the best boosts that you can give your brain, especially exercise that gets your heart pumping. Again, the healthier your heart is, the more effectively your brain can be nourished and work properly. Physical activity has also been linked to decision-making, focus and conflict resolution skills. Don't forget to protect your head from brain injuries during contact sports.

The last components of brain health are socializing and mental exercise. Keep in touch with family and friends to maintain a social environment. Stay engaged and

involved in your community by volunteering or joining a group or club. Get to know your neighbors to create connections close to home. Mental exercise helps to keep your brain connections working. Examples of mental exercise include games, puzzles, reading, writing, education and lifelong learning, and hobbies that challenge the brain among many others. Remember taking small steps today for a healthier brain can help you for many years to come!

For more information on brain health, please feel free to contact me for additional resources. Shandi Andres, Flint Hills Extension District, 501 W Main, Council Grove, KS 66846. (620) 767-5136 or sdandres@ksu.edu