

HEALTH MATTERS

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Nurturing Brain Health: Empowering Our Minds During Alzheimer's Month

June is a month dedicated to raising awareness about brain health and Alzheimer's disease, a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that affects millions of lives worldwide. To better understand how each of us can prioritize our own cognitive well-being, we spoke with Jennifer Drofenik, Director of Health Services at Peconic Landing and volunteer Community Educator with the Alzheimer's Association. In honor of Alzheimer's Month, let's dive into some practical strategies that can protect and strengthen our brain health and reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

1. Engage in Regular Physical Exercise:

Physical activity has been linked to improved brain health, as it promotes better blood circulation and increases oxygen flow to the brain. Drofenik suggests, "Engage in activities you enjoy, such as walking, dancing, or swimming, for at least 30 minutes a day to boost your brain health. It doesn't matter what kind of exercise it is, as long as you're moving!"

2. Adopt a Brain-Boosting Diet:

Research has shown that what's good for the heart is good for the brain. Nourishing our bodies with a balanced and heart-healthy diet is paramount. Incorporate a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats into your meals, and emphasize foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as fatty fish, walnuts, and flaxseeds, which have been shown to support heart and brain health.

3. Keep Your Mind Active: Mental stimulation is crucial for maintaining cognitive vitality. Engage in activities that challenge your brain, such as puzzles, reading, learning a new skill or language, or playing musical instruments. According to Drofenik, "By keeping your mind active with new and challenging activities, you are forging new neural connections, which can help protect against cognitive decline."

4. Prioritize Quality Sleep: Sleep plays a pivotal role in rejuvenating the brain. Establish a consistent sleep schedule and create a relaxing bedtime routine to ensure you get 7-8 hours of quality sleep each night. Make your sleep environment conducive to rest and free from distractions such as cell phones and other electronic devices.

5. Cultivate Social Connections: Meaningful social interactions have a profound impact on brain and overall health. Research has shown that social disconnection can have the same negative effects as smoking 15 cigarettes a day! Drofenik emphasizes, "Engage in activities that foster social connections, such as joining clubs, volunteering, or spending time with loved ones." Regular social engagement provides cognitive stimulation, emotional support, and may help reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

6. Manage Stress Effectively: Chronic stress can have detrimental effects on brain health. Implement stress-management techniques like meditation, deep breathing exercises, or engaging in hobbies. As Drofenik reminds us, "Taking care of your mental well-being is just as important as caring for your physical health." This is especially true for caregivers who may sometimes prioritize their loved one's health over their own.

In conclusion, as we commemorate Alzheimer's Month, it is crucial to embrace the importance of brain health and take proactive steps to protect our cognitive well-being. By following the valuable insights shared by Drofenik, we can empower ourselves to nurture our brains and reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Learn more at Peconic Landing's upcoming Brain Health and Alzheimer's Awareness Education Series in partnership with the Alzheimer's Association.

- **July 5 at 3pm:** 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's
- **August 2 at 3pm:** Understanding Alzheimer's & Dementia
- **September 6 at 3pm:** Effective Communication Strategies (For Caregivers)

"Our aim with this series is to empower individuals with knowledge about brain health, provide practical tips for maintaining cognitive well-being, and help families make informed decisions about brain health and dementia care," said Drofenik. "We believe that by raising awareness and enhancing understanding, we can make a significant impact in the lives of those affected by Alzheimer's."

Admission to the series is free, but registration is required. To secure your seat, call the Alzheimer's Association at 1-800-272-3900, or visit www.peconiclanding.org/events to learn more.

Join us in the fight against Alzheimer's by supporting the first-ever Walk to End Alzheimer's on the North Fork, taking place at Peconic Landing on Sunday, August 6. Register at www.peconiclanding.org/events