

Teresa Hatfield  
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

## **A Healthy Body Supports a Healthy Brain**

As the Family and Community Wellness agent with K-State Research and Extension's Meadowlark District, I often partner with local organizations to promote health and well-being in our community. Currently, I am working with the Alzheimer's Association as a community educator, sharing information about Alzheimer's disease and brain health.

While the causes of Alzheimer's disease are still being studied and there is no cure, research shows there are steps we can take to care for our bodies in ways that support brain health. Although these steps cannot guarantee prevention of dementia, they can help reduce risk and support overall health.

The Alzheimer's Association outlines **10 healthy habits** that may promote better brain health. These include protecting your head protection, not smoking, staying physically active, managing diabetes, getting quality sleep, eating a healthy diet, challenging your mind, controlling blood pressure, continuing education or lifelong learning, and maintaining a healthy weight. Let's take a closer look at a few of these habits.

### **Eat for Your Brain**

The *Healthy Brain, Healthy Body* fact sheet from K-State Research and Extension notes growing evidence that the gut acts like a "second brain." In addition to helping with digestion, it also affects mood and overall health. Eating a variety of nutrient-dense foods can support both gut and brain health.

Foods associated with brain health include green leafy vegetables, nuts, berries, beans, whole grains, fish, poultry, and olive oil. Try incorporating these foods into meals and snacks on a regular basis.

### **Get a Good Night's Sleep**

Sleep plays an essential role in overall health, including heart and brain health. During sleep, the body processes the day's events and allows time for repair and renewal. Most adults should aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night, while children and teens need even more.

Establishing a consistent sleep routine can help. Try going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, sleeping in a dark, cool, and comfortable environment, and limiting alcohol before bedtime. Alcohol can interfere with rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which is important for brain restoration.

### **Challenge Your Brain**

Keeping your brain active is another key component of brain health. Engaging in a variety of mentally stimulating activities helps keep the brain sharp and encourages new neural connections. Try challenging your brain with more complex activities such as learning to play a musical instrument, studying a new language, taking a class, or expressing creativity through painting or other visual arts.

The heart and brain are closely connected, so caring for one supports the other. Small, healthy choices can add up over time and make a meaningful difference. It is never too late to start making decisions that support a healthier body and brain.