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FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

BRAIN HEALTH IN OLDER ADULTS

Learn more about brain health as the body ages, how it connects to critical social issues facing the United States, and what the Y is doing to address it.

WHAT IS BRAIN HEALTH?

Brain health is the ability to learn, think, and remember. Some decline in cognition and memory is normal as one ages. However, a significant decline in the ability to learn new tasks, process information or short- and long-term memory may be a symptom of Alzheimer's Disease (AD) and other types of mental disorders or cognitive impairments.

Brain health focuses on how individuals can care for their brain to prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's Disease and other types of dementia. Current research has shown that exercise, combined with healthy eating and mental and emotional activities, improves brain health.

Brain health is directly connected to a critical social issue affecting our communities: needs associated with an aging population.

WHY DOES IT MATTER TO THE Y?

An urgent need exists to find effective treatment for Alzheimer's Disease that can arrest or reverse the disease at its earliest stages. The emotional and financial burden of Alzheimer's Disease to patients, family members, and society is enormous, and is predicted to grow exponentially as the median population age increases.

- Alzheimer's Disease is now the sixth leading cause of death for all ages.
- One out of every three older adults dies with dementia.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), twice as many Americans fear the loss of mental capability more than they do diminished physical ability.
- According to the CDC, in 2018, total payments for health care, long-term care, and hospice for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias are estimated to be \$277 billion.
- Currently, one person develops Alzheimer's Disease every 67 seconds.

- In 2050, someone in the United States will develop Alzheimer’s disease every 33 seconds.
- According to the CDC, in 2018, more than an estimated 16 million Americans are providing more than 18.4 billion hours of unpaid care for family and friends with Alzheimer’s other dementias. The total value of that care is about \$232 billion.

Research suggests that exercise, combined with healthy eating and mental and emotional activities improves brain health as people age and may delay or prevent the onset of Alzheimer’s Disease and other forms of dementia.

HOW IS THE Y ADDRESSING THIS CONCERN?

In 2016, YMCA of the USA (Y-USA), working with the Alzheimer’s Disease Cooperative Study (ADCS) at the University of California, San Diego, in partnership with Wake Forest University and funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), launched **EXERT**, a study to evaluate the role of physical activity in improving brain health in individuals with mild cognitive impairment (MCI).

Mild cognitive impairment is a slight but noticeable and measurable decline in cognitive abilities, including memory and thinking skills. While noticeable, the cognitive decline does not impede an individual from completing daily tasks. A person with MCI is at an increased risk of developing Alzheimer’s or another dementia.

Up to 300 adults 65 years and older with MCI will participate in the EXERT study. The Y’s role is to oversee and manage supervision of study participants as they complete the exercise treatment (prescription). Currently 13 YMCAs have been selected to participate in the study.

EXERT is in the efficacy stage of the Program Development Model. The outcomes of the study and future validation studies will inform next steps. EXERT is expected to be available to YMCAs across the country as early as 2018.

The resources listed below can help you learn more about brain health:

- [The Healthy Brain Initiative](#)
- [AARP—Brain Health](#)
- [Go4Life from the National Institute on Aging](#)
- [Department of Health and Human Services Alzheimer’s Resource Center](#)
- [Alzheimer’s Association Public Health Resource Page](#)