

JUNE 2021 | ISSUE NO. 3

THE ADVOCATE

Health tips and resources for MCG employees and their families



THE BRAIN ISSUE

How to stay sharp and prevent cognitive decline.

FUN FACTS ABOUT YOUR BRAIN

- 60% of your brain matter is made of fat, which is important for your brain's performance! Eat brain-boosting foods like salmon, eggs, blueberries, and nuts.
- Your brain isn't fully formed until age 25. The parts of your brain that control planning and reasoning are the last to develop.
- The storage capacity of your brain is virtually unlimited! In certain brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, cells in your brain can become damaged and affect your memory.
- Your brain can generate enough power to light a bulb. All that power requires adequate sleep. Lack of sleep can cause a buildup of proteins in your brain that is linked to Alzheimer's.
- About 75% of your brain (brain matter and the fluid around your brain) is made up of water. Be sure to stay hydrated, especially in hot weather. The average adult should drink about a half a gallon of water every day.

BRAIN FERTILIZER

Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), also known as brain fertilizer, is an important protein that improves overall brain function by supporting growth of new cells and survival of existing cells. Exercise is one of the most powerful tools we can use to increase BDNF in our bodies, which naturally declines as we age. Too rapid of a decrease can lead to Alzheimer's, Dementia and other brain health conditions. Check out this [case study](#)!



To summarize the study, 35 older and inactive rats were put on a 5 week exercise program: Running on a wheel for 4-6 min, 4 times per week. After 5 weeks, cognitive function increased in all of the rats studied! They performed better on maze work and were able to assess their surroundings and safety much more effectively than when they were inactive. The increased oxygen in the blood seemed to reverse age-related memory loss and spatial understanding impairments previously recorded.

Obviously, people are different from rats. BUT, the key takeaway is that even short exercise sessions a few times a week will deliver cognitive benefits. If you want help getting started, contact Julie, your Fitness Advocate, at (941)748-4501 x3966.



WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE HEART IS GOOD FOR THE BRAIN

The same risk factors that can increase your chance of a heart attack or stroke—including inflammation, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, poor diet, smoking, obesity, diabetes and lack of physical activity—can also up your risk for memory loss, cognitive dysfunction, dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Your heart pumps about 20 percent of your blood to your brain, nourishing it with the oxygen it needs. However, the above-mentioned behaviors and conditions can interfere with blood flow by causing narrowing of the blood vessels and hardening of the arteries. This loss of blood flow can lead to heart problems as well as problems with thinking, memory and an overall decline in cognitive function.



We invest in a holistic wellbeing approach and offer programs and services in the areas of physical, emotional, financial, community, and career health. When each of these areas are well, our employees are able to bring their best selves to work and help us make Manatee County a premier place in which to live and work and play.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

While you're catching some zzzz's, your brain is hard at work. Everything you learn, see, do, or think about during the day is stored in your brain.



And while you're sleeping, your brain deals with these data through reorganization, strengthening of neural pathways, and erasing unneeded information. If you don't get enough sleep, your brain is unable to complete its task and you might wake up feeling a little foggy and less able to process new information.

Sleep is also linked to your overall cognitive function, like attention, memory, problem-solving, and decision making. A recent study found that people who got, on average, less than 4 hours or more than 10 hours of sleep each night not only had lower cognitive function but also experienced faster cognitive decline.

Most adults need 7-9 hours each night. If you have trouble sleeping, try keeping a regular sleep schedule, avoiding caffeine, relaxing before bed, avoiding bright lights, and removing your computer and TV from your bedroom. See a doctor if you have chronic sleep problems or if you feel unusually tired during the day. To find out what types of sleep studies are covered by the YourChoice Health Plan, contact the Nurse Advocates at (941)748-4501 x6407.

REVERSING THE EFFECTS OF CHRONIC STRESS ON YOUR BRAIN

It's not unusual to feel disorganized and forgetful when experiencing an increase in your stress levels. But over the long term, chronic stress changes your brain in ways that affect your memory and your mental and physical health.

Here are some tips that can help you better manage stress and prevent some of the damaging effects chronic stress has on your brain.

1. Exercise regularly
2. Practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, tai chi, or massage
3. Have a sense of humor
4. Spend time with family and friends
5. Practice Mindfulness
6. Schedule time for hobbies, such as reading a book or listening to music
7. Use your five free therapy sessions with a LAMP therapist to learn and implement stress management techniques. To schedule an appointment, please call the LAMP line (941) 741-2995.

UPCOMING EVENTS

[Learn more and register at manateeyourchoice.com/register](https://manateeyourchoice.com/register)

Fatty Liver: What it is and what to do about it
June 15 & 17

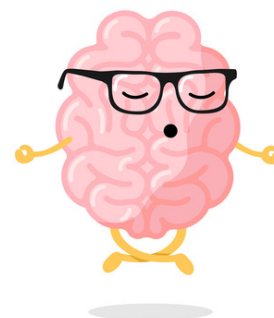
What's the Connection?
July 13 & 15

DROP: How to invest with no market risk
July 23

Women and Wealth
August 13

T1 Listening Session
Multiple Dates

Survival Skills Wrap Up
Multiple Dates





SPOTLIGHT ON MENTAL HEALTH

May was Mental Health Month and departments around the County helped bring awareness to the issue by wearing green and signing the Stigma Free Pledge. If you are struggling with a mental health issue - anxiety, depression, anger, hopelessness, etc - know that you are not alone. Find a co-worker or friend you can trust and reach out to LAMP to talk to a therapist in person or via telehealth. All employees receive their first 5 sessions free every year. Call the confidential LAMP line at 941-741-2995.



STRESSING ABOUT MONEY?

Having a plan for the future can relieve chronic stress and improve your overall sense of wellbeing. We offer multiple financial-wellbeing resources to help.

- **Smart Dollar** - your free online money tool to help you eliminate debt, save for emergencies, and retire with confidence!
- **VOYA on-demand videos** provide free education so you can plan for the retirement you always dreamed about.
- **Learn about DROP** at an in-person and live-streamed seminar on July 23rd.

ZUMBA BRAIN BENEFITS

You know what else is good for your brain? DANCING! Science has proven over and over again that dancing can improve memory, reaction time, elevate mood, and lower risk of dementia!

Feel like dancing? Come join us at the Fitness Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12pm and 5:30pm! We are also excited to add back Zumba Saturday @ 9am starting in July!



THE MOST PERFECT FOOD FOR BRAIN HEALTH

When the topic of brain health comes up, there is often a list of foods presented as good for your brain. And you have probably seen this list (yes, blueberries are on there!). But I would like to point your focus on fish and seafood. Everyone knows fish is brain food, but Americans generally don't eat food from the sea very often. Luckily, we live in Florida where many delicious types of fish abound and fishing is a common outdoor activity.



Besides being good for clear thinking and memory, a diet with fish/seafood about twice per week also helps to lower blood pressure and triglyceride levels, reduce risk of heart disease, and prevent blood clots and stroke. Another brain health benefit among frequent fish eaters is a 20% lower rate of depression.

The best type of fish to eat for mental health would be fish caught in colder waters because of the high omega-3 content. These include:

- Salmon
- Bluefish
- Anchovies
- Pompano
- Oysters
- Sardines
- Artic Char
- Whitefish
- Squid
- Cod
- Herring
- Tuna
- Swordfish
- Mussels
- Sable
- Mackerel
- Halibut
- Scallops

Keep seafood preparation simple by coating a pan with a slick of olive oil and cooking at medium high heat, about 5 minutes per side (longer if thicker than one inch). Season with lemon pepper and dill. Or place a casserole dish in the oven at 400 degrees for 15 minutes with your fish which has been brushed with melted butter, salt and pepper and a small amount of broth to poach.

RECIPE

CAJUN SALMON WITH SWEET POTATO FRIES AND ROASTED ZUCCHINI SPEARS

By Becky Roberts (one of our past recipe contest winners); serves one.

6 oz salmon fillet (halibut, tilapia or other varieties also work well)

Olive oil cooking spray

1 large thin sweet potato

1 large zucchini

Cajun spice blend, no or low salt preferred (such as Mrs. Dash Cajun blend)

1 tsp dried parsley (optional)

½ tsp garlic powder

Pinch of cayenne powder

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Spray a baking pan and then the salmon with cooking spray. Wash sweet potato and zucchini, but do not peel. Cut into long wedges and spray with cooking spray. Place fish, sweet potatoes and zucchini on pan and sprinkle spices over all. Bake for 20 minutes, turning over at half-way point.

[Click here](#) for more simple and easy ways to cook fish.

RX FOR YOUR BRAIN

A key factor to good brain health is being in control of any preexisting chronic condition such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar, and inflammatory disorders. Any condition that contributes to the damage of blood vessels could decrease the normal blood flow to the brain and could lead to memory loss, cognitive disorders, and dementia.



Some medications that may contribute to memory loss include: Anti-drugs (antihistamines, beta blocker antihypertensives, antiparkinsonians, antipsychotics, tricyclic antidepressants), anxiolytics, narcotics, sedatives, sleep aids, and incontinence medications. But, the benefits of the medications may outweigh the risks, so talk to your doctor if you have concerns.

You can also speak to your doctor or Pharmacy Advocate about over-the-counter supplements for brain health, including: Coenzyme Q10, calcium, ginkgo biloba, omega-3 fatty acids, turmeric, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, and vitamin B9.

Bottom line: Treat underlying conditions properly. Do not stop any prescribed medications abruptly. Talk to your doctor about any concerns and call your pharmacy advocate, Alma, at (941)748-4501 x6406 if you have any questions.

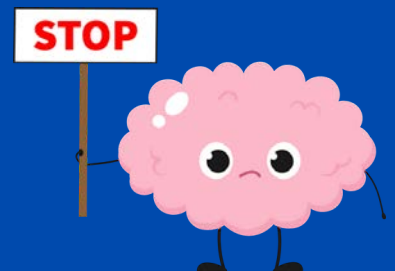
THE SCIENCE OF SMOKING & BRAIN HEALTH

Most people don't know that cigarette smoking negatively affects your brain. Specifically, it's the nicotine in cigarettes that changes your brain, which is why you have withdrawal when you try to quit.

Many studies show the effects nicotine and smoking have on the brain. Some of the findings include:

- **Cigarette smoking is associated with a higher risk of cognitive decline.** Cognitive decline is when you experience worsening or more frequent confusion or memory loss.
- **Smokers have an increased risk of developing dementia.** Dementia is a condition that can affect memory, thinking, language, judgment, and behavior. It can also cause personality changes.
- **You lose brain volume the longer you smoke.** In one study, current smokers had 9.23cm less total brain volume than nonsmokers. That is almost two teaspoons!
- **Smoking can affect the structural integrity** of some areas of the brain.

Now is a great time to quit. Call Vanessa Rene at (941)748-4501 x6418 to discuss all the available options to help you quit.





YourChoice Advocates Are Available to Help!

**ALLISON MINARDI**

Worksite Wellness Manager
aminardi@manateeyourchoice.com
x3667

- Ergonomics & Desk Station set up
- Posture Assessments
- Pre-Work Stretch program

**ALMA LEON, PHARM D, RPH**

Pharmacy Advocate
aleon@manateeyourchoice.com
x6406

- Consultations
- Prior Authorizations
- Cost Saving Opportunities
- Compound Prescription Reimbursement
- Pharmacy or medication related questions

**CLARIBEL GILL, MS**

LAMP Counselor & Psychiatric Clinic Coordinator
cgill@manateeyourchoice.com
x6408

- Individual, couples, and family counseling.
- Schedules appointments for in-house counseling, Psychiatric ARNP, and assists with medication management calls.

**DEBBIE MISKELL, RN**

Nurse Advocate
dmiskell@manateeyourchoice.com
x6407

- Pre-authorizations
- Proper sleep, bone health, & heart health
- Healthy Pregnancy
- Provider Referrals
- Nurse Related Questions

**FLOREY MILLER, CDE, RD**

Nutrition & Diabetes Advocate
fmiller@manateeyourchoice.com
x6410

- Help managing diabetes
- Discuss nutrition and diet
- Assess risk for diabetes

**JENNIFER RUIZ, RN**

Nurse Advocate & Health First Coord.
jrui@manateeyourchoice.com
x6409

- Nurse Advocacy
- Health First
- Bariatric Program Coordinator
- Healthy Weight Resources
- General Health Guidance
- Community Physician Referrals

**JULIE DRACKETT**

Fitness Coordinator
jdrackett@manateeyourchoice.com
x3966

- Learn stretches and strengthening moves to support mobility and decrease discomfort
- workspace ergonomic assessments
- Fitness Programs

**RANDI MCDOWALL, LCSW**

LAMP Supervisor/Care Coordinator
rmcdowall@manateeyourchoice.com
x6469

- Worksite programing regarding Behavioral Health Topics
- Help finding in-network Therapists/ Psychiatrists
- Coaching sessions for members participating in certain wellbeing programs

**VANESSA RENE, CPHT, RPHT**

Pharmacy & Tobacco Advocate
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x6418

- Tobacco Cessation Aids
- Prior Authorizations
- Vaccination Questions
- Compound Reimbursements
- Pharmacy Related Questions



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