



# Keeping Our Brains Healthy

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

“What doesn’t our brain do for our body?” asks Wendy Hall, LCSW at the Robert Boissoneault Oncology Institute. “Our brain does everything that’s important to our functioning.”

Speaking at RBOI’s We Can Week, a free community support event for adults facing cancer, survivors, and their families, Hall says that brain health involves much more than just memory. She outlines five ways that we can maintain a healthy brain.

1. Be socially active, whether in person or remotely. We Can Week and RBOI’s support groups have adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic, offering an online option that keeps people connected.
2. Stay mentally stimulated. Puzzles and reading engage our brains. So do hobbies that involve hand-eye coordination, like knitting or woodworking.

3. Get enough sleep. Insufficient sleep affects both our mood and our reasoning ability. The National Institutes of Health found that volunteers who slept 8 hours outperformed those who slept only 6 or 7 hours when it came to learning a task.
4. Engage in healthy eating habits and make sure you are well-nourished. Writes Eva Selhub, MD, at Harvard Health, “[W]hat you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood.”
5. Exercise is the most important way to maintain a healthy brain. “If we’re doing all the different things we can do to engage our brain, make sure to have a component of exercise,” Hall says. “It can be daily walking. Whatever we can start out with, whatever kind of exercise is what we should do.”

## Journaling for Health

“Sometimes we have a lot going on and we don’t really understand it ourselves,” says Amy Roberts, LCSW at RBOI. “We just know we feel stressed. We don’t know why.” Managing that stress is key to brain health and well-being. “I have been writing to help myself when I’m feeling overwhelmed, replaying the same thoughts over and over,” she adds.

Roberts advises writing in a free flow, paying no attention to grammar, punctuation, or spelling,



for ten minutes at a time. “I’m just going to dump all this stuff out on paper and get it out of my head,” she says. “By the time I’m done dumping out all that information, I start making connections. And then I have a better understanding of what I want to do and how to cope with it.” Insights can happen on the first day of journaling or later on.

“There’s a lot of research behind journaling as a way to get out all the stuff you’re carrying mentally, emotionally, and physically, onto paper and out of the body,” Roberts says. Your entries can be private. It can even be cathartic to shred, burn, or scribble on them afterwards.

Self-care is the bottom line. By associating the writing with something pleasant, like the warm aroma of coffee or essential oils, journaling at the same time each day can help reinforce the habit. “This is me investing in my life and taking a ten-minute step to creating a healthy habit for myself.”

## Join Us

RBOI provides support services, including We Can events, to our community free of charge. Call Wendy Hall (352-527-0106) or Amy Roberts (352-732-0277) for more information.

21

Days of repeating an activity until a habit becomes established in the brain’s neural pathways.

25%-35%

Reduced risk of depression in people who ate “traditional” diets (e.g., high in fruits and vegetables) versus “Western” diets (e.g., high in meats and processed foods).

20 & 3

Writing in a journal for as little as 20 minutes a month for 3 months can benefit physical and emotional health.

More than 100

Types of dementia. Practicing good brain health can help reduce your risk.



Wendy Hall, LCSW  
Citrus County, Timber Ridge



Amy Roberts, LCSW  
Ocala, The Villages

Our on-site Licensed Clinical Social Workers meet with each patient to help them and their family members navigate through the physical, emotional, and practical demands of a cancer illness and also help connect them to additional and appropriate resources, support, and services.



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