



HANDOUT-ABLE: Every-day Lifestyle Choices to Encourage Brain Support

On a daily basis, there are every-day lifestyle choices that encourage and support brain health. Please take care to incorporate each of these suggestions into your daily schedule.

- **Balanced Eating.** Take care to not cut out any major food groups (healthy fats, vegetables, protein, fruit, dairy, grains), as each food group serves a purpose for brain health. Keep it balanced. Ask your medical provider for a referral to a dietician if there are concerns or questions about your eating habits.

- **Movement.** Consistent movement of the body through exercise, dance, walking, or even rapid arm movements – if possible – will increase the heart rate and bring oxygen to the brain. This helps with circulation for brain support. Fulfilling home programs of physical therapists and occupational therapists can aid in this. If it isn't possible to move out of a wheelchair, then dancing in a chair can be a benefit. Physical limitations of course will play a role in this; if possible, increasing the heart rate on a regular basis will benefit brain functioning. In addition, there are many health benefits to exercise beyond benefitting brain health.

- **Adequate Sleep.** Each person has to find their own "ideal" number of hours each night, although it has been recommended to attempt to reach eight hours of sleep every night. Factors to consider when problem-solving how to improve sleeping patterns include:

1. Consider whether you would benefit from a new mattress;
2. If lights at night are impacting your ability to fully rest (consider buying an eye mask, or new curtains);
3. If noise is a factor (try ear plugs);
4. If napping during the day is impacting functional sleep at night (if possible, avoid day-time napping), and
5. Consider sleep hygiene practices (most people benefit from limiting electronic devices in the evenings, listening to soft music, ask for a foot rub, taking a warm bath, conduct other activities in attempts to "ramp down" before heading into bed).

It is recommended that you speak to your medical provider if these attempts do not improve the quality or quantity of your sleep.

- **Adequate Hydration.** Even mild dehydration can result in cognitive difficulties, and it increases your risk of other health problems, such as urinary tract infections, fatigue, etc. Ask your medical provider about what your ideal water intake amount is for each day. Hydration needs also can be met by eating fruit; however, this is not sustainable to meet all physical requirements. Clear, plain water is a benefit to brain health.



- **Increase Interaction Time with Others.** Call up a friend you haven't spoken to in years. Join a support group. Join an online community. Join a club. Set out to meet new people if possible, when it is possible. This does a brain good, too. Sometimes, connecting with others remind us who we are, which is good for our mood, which impacts brain function.

- **Cognitive Stimulation.** Take care to perform a different activity each day outside of "the norm" for you. These activities should be something challenging, and not the usual activities you perform. A list of stimulating cognitive activities can be provided by your SLP to match your current level of function. These activities need to be enjoyable enough to be sustainable over time, but also do-able and challenging, but not to the point of frustration. Think of it as exercise for your brain. Mix it up, and keep your brain guessing on each challenging activity can occur each day outside of what you have been doing on a daily basis for the last month or so. An example of this is to learn a brand-new hobby, or increase mastery in learning how to develop complexity in tasks you already know how to perform. Another example: contributing to a cause outside of yourself.

- **Fun.** Schedule in some fun – it does a brain good. Some of the cognitively stimulating activities can fall into this category – but there is no substitute for a "good 'ole time."

- **When Possible, Change the Scenery.** There is a refreshing effect on our cognition when we can change our environment. This can mean taking a driving trip to see the leaves changing colors, to rearranging the furniture in the living room or bedroom. Change is good for the brain, and causes us to adjust.

- **Positive Self-Talk.** Encourage yourself when feeling down, seek out support and talk about feelings. It is important to address any feelings of sadness due to needing to adapt to changes that are occurring -- that are out of your control.

You can take steps each day to improve your cognitive-linguistic health. There may be even more ideas that will come to you to assist you. Please try to keep an open mind about all of the areas that you can address, as each little change will add up to be helpful to your recovery.

- Other ideas: _____
