

BRAIN HEALTH ACTIVITIES

for South Carolina Senior Centers



South Carolina is starting an ambitious plan to help promote healthy aging and raise awareness about brain health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SC Department of Public Health

[BOLD Grant](#)

In 2024, the South Carolina Department of Public Health (DPH) had a conversation with Senior Resources and the SC Santee-Lynches Area Agencies on Aging to determine if there was an opportunity to link senior center activities to brain health. DPH analyzed over 800 senior center activities and aligned them to brain health. This supported the development of the brain health toolkit for senior centers.

World Health Organization

[Brain Health](#)

National Institute of Health – National Library of Medicine

[The impact of sustained engagement on cognitive function in older adults: the Synapse Project](#)

National Institute of Health – National Institute on Aging

- [Participating in the Arts Creates Paths to Healthy Aging](#)
- [Could 'Musical Medicine' Influence Healthy Aging?](#)
- [Loneliness linked to dementia risk in large-scale analysis](#)
- [Lifelong exercise promotes brain health in older adults](#)
- [Diet may improve brain health in older adults with obesity](#)
- [Healthy lifestyle linked with better cognitive function in older adults](#)
- [Heart attacks may be linked to accelerated cognitive decline over time](#)

The Lancet Commission on Dementia

[Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the Lancet standing Commission](#)

Alzheimer's Association

[Overcoming Stigma | Alzheimer's Association](#)

What is **Brain Health?**

Brain health is having a combination of cognitive, neurological, and sensory abilities to improve mental and physical health throughout the life span. Brain health includes taking physical and behavioral actions to decrease dementia risk.

Some steps to raise awareness about brain health include:

- Sharing brain health information with your friends and family
- Starting brain health activities at a younger age
- Promoting the benefits of active living and socialization
- Encouraging activities that promote a healthy body and mind



How does brain health help reduce the risk for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias?

The [Lancet Commission](#) described some specific actions for public health programs to implement to reduce dementia risk across the life course and promote brain health.

1. Prioritize age-friendly and supportive community groups and housing
2. Reduce social isolation by facilitating participation in group activities
3. Ensure good quality education is available for all
4. Encourage cognitively stimulating activities in midlife to protect cognition
5. Treat depression effectively
6. Promote the use of helmets and head protection in contact sports and on bicycles
7. Implement exercise and nutrition services
8. Maintain a healthy weight to reduce obesity and prevent diabetes
9. Prevent or reduce hypertension and detect and treat high LDL cholesterol early
10. Reduce cigarette smoking through education, price control, and smoking cessation advice
11. Make hearing aids accessible for people with hearing loss
12. Reduce high alcohol consumption and risks of overconsumption
13. Increase screening and treatment for vision loss
14. Reduce exposure to air pollution

Why use senior centers and their activities to talk about brain health?

Senior center activities are not only fun and evidence-based, but they also can be linked to important cognitive benefits.

For example, the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) found that the memory improves when the older adult is engaged in cognitively demanding activities such as a senior enrichment project, digital photography, or creative quilting.



Identify the 7 types of activities that support brain health

(See Appendix A for Additional Activities)



Memory Games

Word Search, Memory Matching, or Crossword Puzzles



Mental Stimulation & Creative Projects

Music Lessons, Art Therapy, or Adult Coloring



Education & Lifelong Learning

Senior Courses, Guest Speakers, or History Lessons



Social Cognitive Groups

Bingo, Fellowship, or Storytelling



Cardiovascular & Physical Activity

Walking, Dance, or Chair Yoga



Health Monitoring

Blood Pressure Checks, Vision Screening, or Health Fairs



Engagement & Cultural Events

Senior Enrichment, Soul Train Line Dance, or Art Museum

Facing Stigma

According to the **Alzheimer's Association**, facing stigma is often the primary concern of people living with Alzheimer's disease and the reason why many people do not ask for help.

This stigma can prevent people from:

- Seeking medical treatment for symptoms
- Receiving an early diagnosis or any diagnosis at all
- Living the best quality of life possible
- Making plans for their future
- Benefitting from available treatments
- Developing a support system
- Participating in clinical trials

Purpose of the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed for senior centers to seamlessly implement brain health messaging into current activities and to start meaningful conversations about brain health.

The goal is to link current activities to brain health, providing participants with a brain health boost!

Brain health topics will be introduced using “quick text” and participants will receive an infographic at the end of the activity. The aim is to keep the activity fun and enjoyable, while also promoting ways to decrease a person’s risk for developing Alzheimer’s disease or dementia later in life.

Help make brain health a shared and visible priority in your community.

STEP 1: Add brain health activities to the monthly activity calendar

Identify the brain-healthy activities on the calendar by adding a brain icon next to them.

Please note, if an activity is repeated frequently, then use the brain icon only for the day when the seniors will focus on brain health.

STEP 2: Providing quick text before the activity starts

Use these quick text ideas for brain health to explain how the activity is connected to brain health.

STEP 3: Education for participants

Distribute the 1-page overview of brain health after the activity.

STEP 4: Completing the brain health feedback questionnaire

Complete the brain health feedback questionnaire after each activity.



STEP 1:

Brain Health Activities on the Monthly Calendar (Example)

JAN

Look for our Special  **BRAIN HEALTH** Activities

- Word Search
- Bingo
- Art & Music Therapy
- Devotional
- Exercise
- Science Lesson
- Health Fair
- Family Day!

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Show N Tell 11:15-11:45 Bingo  11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-Arthritis 9-11:30 Shopping Trip 10:30 Word Search  11:15-11:45 Bingo  11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Devotional 11-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-Arthritis 10:30 Arts & Crafts  11:15-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Nutrition Education  11:15-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Movie & Popcorn 11:15-11:45 Braingo  11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-Arthritis 10:30 Movie & Popcorn Part 2 11:15 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Devotional  11:00 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-Arthritis 10:30 11:00-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit  10:30 Summer Science 11:00-11:45 BIG Bingo Friday 11:45-12:30 Lunch	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Surprise Bingo 11:15-11:45 Braingo  11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-Arthritis 10:30 Name That Tune 11:15-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	SENIOR ENRICHMENT DAY 	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-Arthritis 10:30 Summer Science  11:00-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Let's Get Crafty 11:00-11:45 BIG Bingo Friday 11:45-12:30 Lunch	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Word Games 11:15-11:45 Braingo  11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise  11:15-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-GerFit 10:30 Trip-Music Theatre  11:00 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30 Coffee/Open Activities 9:30-10:30 Exercise-Arthritis 10:30 Diabetes Lesson 11:00-11:45 Bingo 11:45-12:30 Lunch	8:30-11:45 Columbia Health Fair  11:45-12:30 Lunch	
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
	FRIENDS & FAMILY DAY 					

STEP 2 & 3:

Quick Text and Education

Before the activity, give the seniors a quick explanation about “WHY?” the activity is connected to brain health.

Keep the message simple and fun!

These quick text examples can also be attached on a social media page or a newsletter.

Memory Games

Memory games and word search activities not only boost your mood, but they also support brain health! By playing memory games, you are directly supporting your brain health by building new connections.

Puzzles help support brain health by stimulating neuron activity, building new neurons, and increasing the blood flow to the brain, while simultaneously providing entertainment. What a winning piece!

Mental Stimulation & Creative Projects

Creating arts and crafts is a way to decrease stress and improve your brain health! These creative activities stimulate areas in your brain that are responsible for memory, coordination, and fine motor skills.



Music lessons do more than just bring us joy; they're like a gym for your brain! They help strengthen memory, focus, and problem-solving skills, supporting brain health over time.

Education & Lifelong Learning

Ready to learn for brain health? Educational sessions or studying support brain health by improving memory, focus, and critical thinking while encouraging lifelong cognitive engagement. Learning about brain health supports your focus and problem-solving.



Social Cognitive Groups

B1 for brain health! Bingo and other social games do more than entertain, they give your brain a boost! By strengthening skills like decision-making and communication, these games give your brain a BINGO winning boost!

Brain health and chat? Engaging in conversation and social interaction is crucial for mental health. Studies show that socializing can help improve cognitive abilities by enhancing verbal memory and stimulating problem-solving skills.

Cardiovascular & Physical Activity

1...2...3...brain health! Activities like exercising support brain health by increasing blood flow to the brain. Tie those shoelaces and let's get the heart pumping for a healthier brain and heart!

What is good for your heart is good for your brain! Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which enhances cognitive function. Regular exercise has been linked to improvements in memory and brain health.

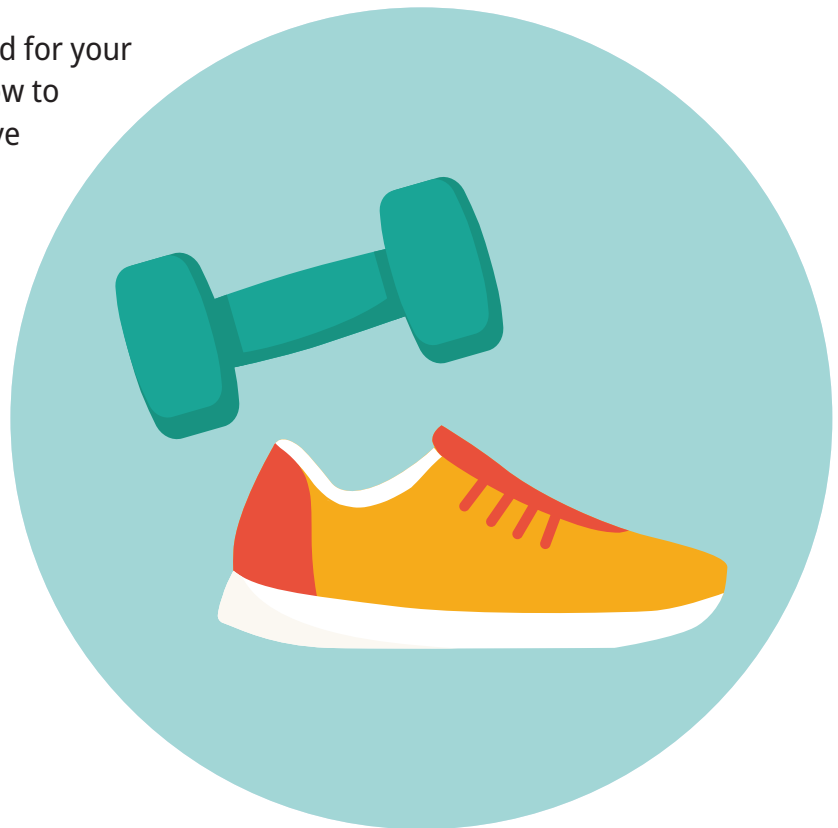
Health Monitoring

Ready to learn more about diabetes or smoking cessation? Attend a health fair or talk to your medical provider about your health. Take that information home and teach a family member or caregiver about what you learned.

Engagement & Cultural Events

Hear That Tune? Music isn't just for the ears, but also for your brain! Listening to music supports brain health by improving sleep quality, mood, mental alertness, and memory. Grab that playlist, dance, and celebrate your brain!

After the activity, distribute the handouts about *Why Cognitive Engagement & Brain Health Matters* and *Ways to Support Brain Health*. These educational materials are included in this toolkit and available to download at dph.sc.gov/brainhealth.



STEP 4: **Brain Health Feedback Questionnaire**



*Scan this QR Code
to complete the*
**Brain Health Feedback
Questionnaire!**

Why Cognitive Engagement & Brain Health Matters

Brain health is essential to overall well-being and lowering your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Here's a quick guide to staying informed and proactive!



About Cognitive Engagement

- Cognitive health is the ability to think, learn, and remember clearly.
- Cognitive engagement means actively participating in meaningful activities that challenge and stimulate the brain, helping improve thinking, memory, and learning.
- Cognitive health is just one aspect of overall brain health.

Tips for a Healthy Brain

- Get regular **physical activity** and eat a **balanced diet** with less fat and more fruits and vegetables. Talk to your provider about a **healthy weight**.
- Get **quality sleep**. Aim for 7-9 hours per night.
- **Stop smoking**. It can negatively impact brain health.
- Knowing your numbers of serious health conditions, like heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. **Talk to your provider** about your numbers.
- Wear a **helmet** when riding a bike and always use **seatbelts** every time you drive or ride in a motor vehicle.

Activities that Support Cognitive Engagement

Memory Games

Like word search, crossword puzzles, and spelling bees

Mental Stimulation

Like Trivia, Family Feud, and music lessons

Social Cognitive Groups & Health Monitoring

Like Bingo, board games, fellowshiping, and health fairs

Education & Engagement

Like senior courses, studying, and visiting history museums

Creative Projects

Like art, crafting, and crocheting

Brain health is important!

Visit dph.sc.gov/brainhealth to learn more.



Ways to Support Your Brain Health



SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

Get Regular Physical Activity

- Aim for 150+ minutes/week of moderate activity (like brisk walking)
- Do muscle-strengthening exercises 2+ days per week
- Include balance activities (e.g., standing on one foot)
- Stay social and active: try walking with friends, dancing, or gardening

Eat a Healthy Diet

- Choose a balanced diet with less fat and more fruits and vegetables
- Include protein-rich foods: seafood, dairy, soy, beans, peas, lentils
- Read labels and learn about key nutrients for brain health
- Know your calorie needs to manage weight
- Stay hydrated: drink plenty of water

Know Your Numbers

- Many conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes show no early symptoms
- Regular checkups help you spot issues early, so you can take action and stay healthy

Prevent Brain Injury

- Wear a helmet for sports, biking, or motorcycling
- Always use seat belts in vehicles
- Talk to your doctor about your fall risk and ways to stay safe and steady

Care For Your Brain

- Prioritize mental health to reduce stress and anxiety
- Sleep well: Aim for 7–9 hours in a calm, restful space
- Keep learning to stay sharp and engaged

Stop Smoking

- Smoking may increase your risk of cognitive decline, and other tobacco products may cause heart problems, high blood pressure, and feelings of depression or anxiety
- Quitting benefits the health of your brain and body



Brain health is important!

Visit dph.sc.gov/brainhealth to learn more.

APPENDIX A:

More Brain Health Examples

Memory Games:

- Memory Games
- Word Search
- Crossword Puzzles
- Spelling Bee
- Hidden Pictures
- Word Scramble

Mental Stimulation & Creative Projects:

- Trivia
- Jeopardy
- Family Feud
- Name That Tune, Power Hour
- Sudoku
- Rummikub
- Music Lessons
- Bible Study
- Arts & Crafts (*Jewelry Making, Cupcake Decorating, Paintbrush Craft, Initials Plaque Craft*)
- Adult Coloring
- Crochet

Social Cognitive Groups:

- Group Discussions
- Show & Tell
- Social Time (*Fellowship*)
- Bingo
- Coffee & Chat
- Short Story Readings
- Poetry Readings
- Storytelling

Educational Talks & Lifelong Learning:

- Nutrition Education (*Cooking*)
- Health Education (*including Alzheimer's Disease Awareness*)
- Senior Enrichment Day
- Fresh Conversations
- Senior Course
- History 101
- Guest Speakers

Cardiovascular & Physical Activity:

- Aerobics
- Yoga (*Floor Yoga, Chair Yoga*)
- Silver Sneakers (*Falls Prevention*)
- Drumfit
- Gentle Stretching
- Zumba
- Tai Chi
- Senior Exercise/Seniorcize
- Arthritis Exercise
- Fitness/Toning Table
- Senior Cheer Practice
- Dance (*Line, Soul Train, Elvis*)
- Chair Hokey Pokey
- Basketball Toss
- Frisbee Golf
- Ping Pong/Table Tennis
- Walking Club/Walk with Ease
- Matter of Balance

Health Monitoring:

- Blood Pressure Check with Nurse
- Nutrition Services
- Tobacco Cessation
- Sleep Studies
- Community Health Fairs
- Diabetes Screening
- Vision & Hearing Exams
- Oral Hygiene

Engagement & Cultural Events:

- Musical Guests
- Karaoke
- Themed Celebrations
- Museum and Historical Trips
- Social Outings

This publication was made possible by grant/cooperative agreement number CDC-RFA-DP-23-0010, entitled BOLD Public Health Programs to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The contents of this publication are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



dph.sc.gov/brainhealth