

Understanding Your Brain Health Assessment

The Brain Health Assessment questionnaire is a simple tool to understand the most important measurements you need to focus on. It is not a detailed measurement of your brain function or risk for cognitive decline. However, this is an excellent place to start. You need to seek the help of a knowledgeable practitioner to be your guide on this journey.

A complete assessment of your brain function would include a detailed medical history, extensive lab testing, brain imaging and cognitive tests.

Do you feel your brain is as rapid-fire as it was one year ago?

This question is one of the simplest ways to know whether you could do with a "brain upgrade." Though there are several reasons to feel that your brain is not working as well as it used to, it is important to keep in mind that **occasionally** failing to remember names or dates is not a sign of dementia. Sometimes it may be as simple (?) as not sleeping well for one night! Or eating and drinking alcohol late in the evening.

Are your loved ones concerned about your brain function?

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the best, where do you rate your brain health?

Do you rate yourself at less than 5? Are there any recent events or illnesses that can explain this?

If you are at 6-7, what needs to change to reach 9 or 10?

Do you experience a lack of focus, "brain fog," mood issues, or forgetfulness?

How severe are your challenges? If you have had challenges for a long time or they are severe, please meet your healthcare provider to rule out major diseases.

Otherwise, following the information in the infographic, *Lifestyle For Healthy Heart and Brain*, will help you improve your condition. These strategies will help you even if you are under treatment, but you need to work with a knowledgeable practitioner.

Fasting Blood Glucose Levels

Do you know your fasting blood glucose levels? If not, this is the time to ask your doctor for this test. (HbA1C is not the best measure of your blood glucose levels).

Diabetes is a condition of high blood glucose levels. People with diabetes have an increased risk of dementias like Alzheimer's Disease. Some people consider Alzheimer's Disease to be Type 3 diabetes or diabetes of the brain.

According to Diabetes Canada, you are diagnosed with diabetes when your fasting plasma glucose is 7.0 mmol/L (126mg/dL). However, studies done in younger adults have shown that the future development of Alzheimer's Disease was significantly higher and likely to occur earlier among people with blood glucose in the pre-diabetes range of 5.5-7 mmol/L (100-126 mg/dL) when compared to those with blood glucose levels of 5.5 mmol/L (100 mg/dL) or lower.

Research has shown the importance of maintaining stable blood glucose levels throughout the day and night. Wildly fluctuating blood glucose levels are related to cognitive decline and mood issues.

Belly Fat

Even if you are at a "normal" BMI, having excessive belly fat is a risk factor for cognitive decline. Belly fat is an indicator of metabolically unhealthy fat, the fat that accumulates around your organs and blood vessels due to problems with your carbohydrate-insulin metabolism.

(Insulin Resistance or Metabolic Syndrome)

How do you reduce belly fat and save your brain?

Please check the infographic *Lifestyle For Healthy Heart and Brain*.

Do you know your blood pressure levels?

A home blood pressure measuring device is one of the best brain-health investments you can make. Getting your blood pressure checked once a year at your annual check-up does not tell you about your blood pressure at different times of the day.

Hypertension is not just a problem for older adults. Many young people have hypertension and don't even know it! Even those on blood pressure medications may not have your numbers at optimal levels.

What is an optimal BP level for your brain?

This question is best answered in consultation with your healthcare provider. Reaching an optimal BP level using **only** multiple prescription medications versus using a wise combination of therapeutic lifestyle change **and** prescription medications is not the same.

A normal blood pressure level is 120/80 mm Hg or lower.

Alcohol Intake

When it comes to your brain, no amount of alcohol is safe. As the title of an article in *ScienceDaily* says, "*More alcohol, less brain: Association begins with an average of just one drink a day.*"

Sleep Duration

Canada's 24-hour movement guidelines recommend regularly getting 7 to 9 hours of good-quality sleep, with consistent bed and wake-up times.

Longer than 9 hours of sleep duration may indicate mental health challenges or cognitive decline.

Getting less than optimal sleep is related to worsening mental health challenges and cognitive decline.

Chronic insomnia, which is difficulty falling or staying asleep, is not the same as not prioritizing sleep. The best solution for chronic insomnia is CBTi (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia).

If you do not prioritize your sleep, techniques like morning exercise, reducing caffeine intake and lowering exposure to ambient light in the evenings, and scheduling enough time for sleep are some strategies to try.

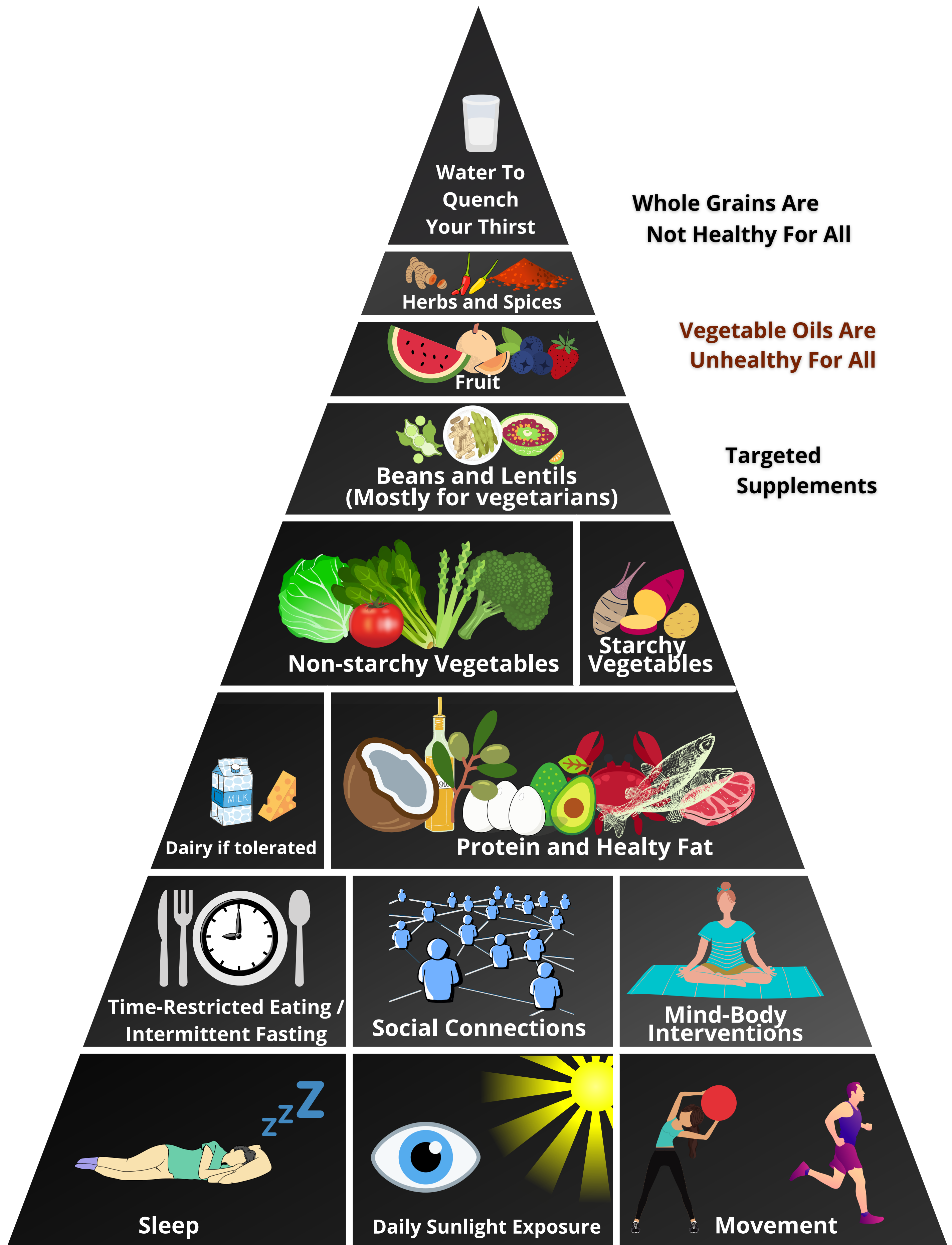
Continuous Sitting

Sitting continuously for several hours a day is devastating for your brain! Canada's 24-hour movement guidelines recommend limiting sedentary time to less than 8 hours a day, with no more than 3 hours of recreational screen time.

Infographic

This infographic shows lifestyle changes that can improve your brain function, no matter your age.

LIFESTYLE FOR HEALTHY HEART AND BRAIN



Disclaimer: The information provided in this document is not to be considered medical advice. It is for information only. Please follow the recommendations of your healthcare provider.

References

1. Boston University School of Medicine. "Lipid and glucose levels at age 35 associated with Alzheimer's disease: Study has implications for delaying or lowering risk." ScienceDaily, 23 March 2022.
2. University of Pennsylvania. "More alcohol, less brain: Association begins with an average of just one drink a day." ScienceDaily, 4 March 2022.
3. <https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-18-64/>