

## Healthy lifestyle habits may improve your memory too

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By: Cathy Payne

A healthy diet is linked to better memory abilities across adult age groups, a new poll finds.



Do you remember what you had for breakfast? If you're a healthy eater, there's a greater chance that you'll recall.

**A healthy lifestyle is linked to better memory across all adult age groups**, even if you're younger than 40, a new study finds.

UCLA researchers and the Gallup organization worked on a poll of 18,552 U.S. adults 18 and older.

**Healthy eating, not smoking, and exercising regularly were linked to better self-perceived memory abilities. Respondents across all age groups who engaged in just one healthy behavior were 21% less likely to report memory problems than those who didn't engage in such behaviors.**

Researchers say they were surprised to find that about 14% of the youngest group (ages 18-39) complained about their memory. About 22% of middle-age adults (ages 40-59) and 26% of older adults (ages 60-99) did.

"Memory issues were to be expected in the middle-aged and older groups, but not in younger people," says the study's lead author, Gary Small, director of the UCLA Longevity Center.

In general, younger people's memory problems may differ from those in older adults, Small says. For example, stress may play a bigger role, he adds. Still, the survey's findings reinforce the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle at all ages to help limit cognitive decline, he says.

"Along with the other healthy behaviors, it's likely that healthy eating is helping keep the heart and blood vessels healthy," says Mary Ann Johnson, national spokeswoman for the not-for-profit American Society for Nutrition. "The brain needs a healthy blood supply to function."

**She says protecting your memory isn't just for older adults. "We think of losing one's memory as late in life, but it is a very long process that has been playing out over decades."**

Neil Levin, spokesman for the not-for-profit American Nutrition Association, says, "The earlier signs of people's memory starting to decline in younger years are not necessarily associated with Alzheimer's," he says, but certain behaviors may be risk factors.

"A lot of young people tend to feel either they are invulnerable or they are not going to live a long time so they might engage in riskier behaviors in terms of diet, smoking and lack of exercise that would affect them long-term," he adds.

Small, a professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA, says that if younger people are experiencing memory problems, they should see their doctor. "The sooner they get help, the better the outcome."

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