

# Staying Sharp After 50



John Scott, a participant in the Disconnected Mind Research Project, holds a 3D printed copy of his brain created from his brain scan

**Losing our thinking skills is one of people's greatest fears about growing older. However, emerging research evidence from the University of Edinburgh suggests that there are things we can all do to protect our brains and thinking skills as we age.**

## Diet

A healthy diet has long been recognised as having a role in preventing diseases like type two diabetes and heart disease but it is also important for brain health.

- Nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D and flavonoids are linked to maintenance of thinking skills in older age.
- High levels of saturated fat (e.g. in butter, palm oil, dairy, meat) are linked to worsening of thinking skills in older age.
- Specific dietary patterns, such as the Mediterranean diet, show positive effects on brain health but it is not clear yet whether switching to such a diet in older age would be beneficial.
- Follow general nutritional advice to eat a balanced diet, high in fruit and vegetables and low in saturated fats.

## Multilingual

You might be surprised to learn that speaking more than one language helps keep your thinking skills healthy in later life.

- If you already know more than one language, it's worth refreshing it. Knowing a language is good but practicing is even better.
- If you are considering learning a new language: it's never too late!

## Smoking

We know that smoking is bad for our lungs and heart but researchers have shown that it also harms the brain.

- Smoking accelerates aging of the brain.
- If you smoke, quit. Partial reversal of the damage to the brain caused by smoking can occur after quitting but it's a long process.
- Brain aging doesn't suddenly start happening at a given age. Rather it appears to be the consequence of factors both genetic and environmental throughout our lives.

**Read more about these topics and many others on the Staying Sharp website: [www.ageuk.org.uk/stayingsharp](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/stayingsharp).**

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