

Residents learn about brain health and protecting cognitive assets

AT A GLANCE

Brain health is a topic of emerging importance. The rise in dementia cases highlights the importance of doing what we can to maintain a healthy brain.

The Situation

Dementia, including Alzheimer's Disease, involves changes in the brain that affect daily living. Symptoms can include memory loss, confusion, poor judgment or changes in personality. Dementia currently affects over 6 million Americans, with a projected cost of \$781 billion in the year 2025. According to the National Institute of Health, 42% of Americans ages 55 and over will eventually develop dementia. With the aging of the U.S. population, the number of new dementia cases is predicted to double by the year 2060.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension family and consumer sciences associate educator Leslee Blanch has developed and presented lifestyle modification education specifically promoting brain health. Pillars of brain health include balanced nutrition, physical and mental activity, adequate sleep, stress management, control of substance use and positive social interaction. Medically researched lifestyle principles are discussed in practical and manageable applications in this education model.



A Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials photo provided by Google images.

Program Outcomes

Brain Health: Protecting Your Cognitive Assets was presented to 245 participants in southeastern Idaho from November 2023 through August 2025. Recipients of this program included local hospital outpatients, county jail inmates, faith-based groups, library patrons, Department of Labor staff and Extension educators and clients. Of the 171 attendees who completed the post-survey, 164 (96 %) reported a gain in new knowledge. Commonly cited knowledge learned included how both physical and mental exercise improve brain health and decrease the risk of developing dementia, and how nutritional habits play a significant

role in brain health. The specific functions that sleep and stress reduction play in brain health was new information for the majority of participants, as was the importance of social engagement.

As a result of this education model, 162 individuals (95%) stated intent for behavioral change. Increasing physical activity, aiming for a minimum of seven hours of sleep per night and practicing stress reduction techniques were frequently stated intentions. Incorporating recommended eating patterns for brain health and regularly engaging in mental activities were also common behavior change goals.

The Future

The brain health education model this educator has provided has been very well received by a wide variety of audiences. This model will continue to be offered in the southeastern Idaho area and beyond. Continued collaboration with the Alzheimer's Association and working with early learning and activity centers will be pursued to provide brain health education throughout the lifespan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Leslee Blanch, Family and Consumer Sciences Associate Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Bonneville County • 208-529-1390 • lblanch@uidaho.edu

32-25-lblanch-brain-health • 10/25