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Talk, walk and eat for better brain wellbeing

Australians identify – but don't necessarily intend to follow – behaviours that they know can lead to improved brain health throughout their lives.

In a new study by researchers at the ARC Centre for Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR), participants reported high awareness of the benefits of key behaviours that can preserve and improve cognitive functioning as they age, although their actual intention to take up these activities is low.

Published in the journal *Preventive Medicine Reports*, *An Australian survey of cognitive health beliefs, intentions and behaviours through the adult life course* shows some differences in how Australians in three age categories (20-44) (45-64) (65+) are concerned about brain health, and positive behavioural changes they can make to mitigate cognitive decline.

"We asked people whether they already participated in behaviours identified as having positive effects on brain functioning, and if not, whether they intended to, and if so, at what age. Younger and middle aged respondents are more worried about brain health than older Australians, with the middle aged group having the highest participation in activities to improve brain health," said Diane Hosking, co-author with Kerry Sargent-Cox and Kaarin Anstey.

Key factors which the three categories agreed were significant to good brain health included

- Socialising
- Consuming more fish and more vegetables
- Increasing physical activity
- Quitting smoking

30 adverse factors for brain health were nominated, leading with alcohol abuse, lack of mental stimulation, smoking and poor nutrition; though ageing itself was not seen as a major contributor to diminished brain performance.

Women were more likely to be aware of the adverse effects of poor health and loneliness, and people with prior exposure to dementia recognised the risks of smoking, alcohol abuse, genetics and physical activity.

"This survey provides information which is essential to the success of public health initiatives and interventions which promote cognitive health across adulthood," said Professor Anstey.

Access to the paper is: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211335515000789>

About CEPAR: CEPAR is a unique, independent, ARC-funded research centre bringing together academia, government and industry to address one of the major social challenges of the twenty first century. It is based at University of New South Wales, with nodes at the Australian National University and the University of Sydney.

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