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Stop thinking, start acting to maintain a healthy brain

IT SEEMS Australians know what they should be doing for their own wellbeing but are not translating that knowledge into action.

A new study on brain health by researchers at the ARC Centre for Excellence in Population Ageing Research has found that while people identify what they need to do to improve their brain health, they don't necessarily do it!

Study participants reported a high awareness of the benefits of key behaviours that can preserve and improve cognitive functioning as they age, but their actual intention to take up these activities was low.

“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,” said one of the report authors Diane Hosking.

“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.”

All age categories agreed socialising, eating more fish and vegetables, getting more active and quitting smoking contributed to a healthy brain. Adverse factors for brain health include alcohol abuse, lack of mental stimulation, smoking and poor nutrition.

Contrary to popular perception, ageing itself was not seen as a major contributor to diminished brain performance.

Women were more likely to be aware of the ill effects of poor health and loneliness, and people with prior exposure to dementia recognised the risks of smoking, alcohol abuse, genetics and lack of physical activity. ■ CEPAR is an independent research centre funded by the Australian Research Council and based at the University of NSW, www.cepar.edu.au