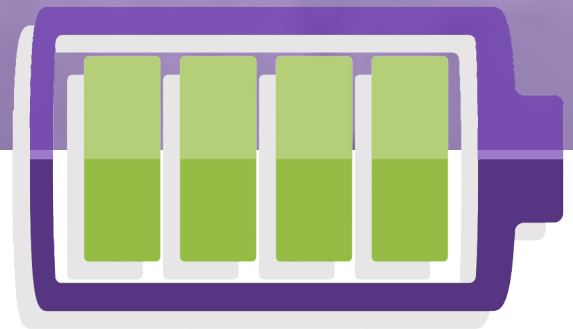




9 Signs You're Experiencing Brain Drain

And How to Keep Your Brain Fully Charged to Ward Off Dementia



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Dementia is not a normal part of aging.

To start off, let's all be clear:

Brain fog, forgetting names, forgetting where you put things, feeling dazed and confused? Your instant recall coming a day or two late?

None of this is a normal part of aging, no matter what you've been told.

You might think, Oh lord, this is it—Alzheimer's and dementia are setting in! But trust me, that does not have to be a case.

Why?

Because dementia is not a normal part of aging.

Let me repeat that, for the folks in the back, because it flies in the face of everything we're told.

Dementia is not a normal part of aging. It is, in fact, very possible to age without losing your mind. To grow older, to reach age 100 and beyond, without growing mentally feeble.

Hard to believe, because it seems to have happened so fast—one day you're feeling sharp as a blade, and then, you wander down to the basement for something and can't for the life of you recall why you're there.

Unfortunately, our society constantly sets our brains up to fail. We're conditioned to do what's convenient, not what's healthy.

Fact is, your brain is not gone forever, and dementia is not a foregone conclusion. When you learn how your brain works, you can take steps to recharge it and get it back on track.

And if you know what triggers dementia, you can take your brain's health back into your own hands and charge it to the fullest. You can avoid these triggers and implement brain-boosting habits that will help regenerate fresh brain cells and newer, stronger connections. And, if you're diligent, it's very possible to build a brain that gets better and sharper with age.

If you know what triggers dementia, you can take your brain health back!

Here are the nine critical signs you might be vulnerable to dementia—and tips on how to protect your brain and build resilience.

SIGN #1: You put up with toxicity for the sake of convenience



Alright, I know that toxicity has been decried from the health mountain tops already, but hear me out. There are specific toxins that are proven to have a negative effect on your brain, and can even trigger dementia if left unchecked. Give yourself a 360-degree detox by checking for toxins:

Toxins trigger dementia

In your home. It's time to send all that plastic to recyclable heaven. Plastic glasses, plastic wrap, and plastic dishware all leach BPA and Phthalates into your food and body. And that causes a continual imbalance in your hormones and throws your immune system off-kilter. If you cannot throw them all out just yet, make double sure you never heat or freeze in them. Two other big culprits? Lead and aerosols. If you live in a historic district, be sure to have the paint in your home tested and avoid breathing in cleaning chemicals (ammonia, vinegar, acids, bleaching agents) and aerosols (hairspray, spraying bubbles, air fresheners).

In your food. I hate to break it to you, but cooking with aluminum foil or with aluminum pots and pans is a huge brain drain. I get that it's convenient for clean up, but studies show that micro aluminum particles seep into your food. Opt for parchment paper and stainless steel cookware instead. Prevent sticking by coating cookware with real butter, olive oil or coconut oil.

In your body. Some generations (ahem, some of us) were given mercury tooth fillings as children. Mercury is absolutely toxic for your brain, and your fillings leave you constantly exposed. Hot foods create a mercury vapor you inhale and both hot and cold foods make your mercury fillings expand and contract—causing you to swallow micro mercury particles.

After synergizing with aluminum, the brain is fighting an uphill battle when it tries to wash these toxins out. If you do one thing on this list—please, please go get your mercury fillings removed. Don't let the cost prohibit you: If you love and trust your dentist, the two of you can agree that the old fillings were “worn out and need to be replaced.” Dental insurance should cover replacement fillings. Also, make sure replacement fillings are safe and not of plastics containing BPA or phthalates!

TRY IT: Pan for plastics and aluminum. Do a room-by-room, drawer-by-drawer scan of your home and identify what has to go, and what better quality item you can replace it with.

SIGN #2: Most of the food you eat comes out of a box, can, or bag



Look, I get it. Processed foods are convenient treats. Let those among us who have not polished off a whole sleeve of Oreos by themselves cast the first stone. But the truth is, anything that isn't a one ingredient, whole, natural food is seriously draining your brain.

Processed foods drain your brain.

I know that eliminating all processed foods is a tall order. So let's go after the big fish first and foremost:

Hydrogenated oils. We're talking vegetable oils, margarine, packaged snacks, baked goods, and fried foods (I know, the southern girl in me just cried some tiny tears over fried food).

But the truth is, hydrogenated oil takes a toll on your brain because it's not a natural product, and your gut-brain doesn't actually know what to do with it. The result is inflammation and the excessive release of free radicals—both of which interfere with mood and cognition while inflicting long-term damage on healthy brain cells. Added to processed foods by profit-driven manufacturers to drive costs down and extend shelf life, hydrogenated oils do you and your brain no favors at all.

Read the ingredients on any packaged food carefully. Scan the label to be sure that it contains no hydrogenated oils, period.

Replace vegetable oil with olive oil or coconut oil for a brain-healthy alternative. And as much as it pains the Southerner in me to say this...don't deep-fat fry anything.

Say goodbye to the 5 white foods

The five white foods: sugar, flour, potatoes, corn, and rice. These may be delicious, but they're total brain blockers. These starches produce a huge spike in insulin, and over time, your body becomes insulin resistant. And when your brain becomes insulin resistant, the nutrients from your food are unable to penetrate those brain cells—and that starves your brain cells until they die out. This is called Diabetes III because, over time, brain insulin resistance paves the way to dementia.

Milk. Yea, really. Cow's milk contains a protein casein and casein prohibits the absorption of micronutrients from foods, especially berries, chocolate, and tea. So when we douse milk on our gluten loaded wheat cereal (which we shouldn't be eating anyway) loaded with blueberries, spoon up yogurt full of strawberries, add cream in our coffee (a brain superfood) or sprinkle cheese on our phenomenally nutrients-loaded green salad...it's a waste. Casein in the milk will not allow you to absorb all the nutrients. Baby cows should only drink cow's milk.



Instead, fill your diet with these brain superfoods:

Berries. While I'm a fan of all berries, blueberries are best (opt for wild or organic if available).

Fish oil and omega 3's. Think cold water, wild caught, small to medium size fish and all shellfish.

From shrimp to crab, salmon to sardines, mackerel to mangrove snapper and all in-between, they're all great choices and can be part of any meal or snack.

Green tea. It's full of antioxidants for one, and it helps to create new neurons as well as build new neural pathways. There are also many different kinds and styles of green tea to try, whether you like sweeter or more vegetal (a toasted rice green tea, called genmai cha, is extremely popular). Find your favorite and drink it daily. (I live in a rural area with no retail tea shop for 250 miles, I just get regular green tea in the tea section).

Dark leafy greens. Think spinach, kale, swiss chard, broccoli, arugula, turnip greens, collard greens, cabbage. These are nutritional powerhouses—plus your intestines love them for their fiber!

TRY IT: Two steps forward, no steps back. Here's the kicker—you can add superfoods to your diet every day. But hydrogenated oils and the white foods are basically kryptonite to their superpowers: If you don't eliminate the bad, the good is powerless. Start by slowly detoxing these ingredients over two weeks. Then, add in your superfoods. Stay attuned to how your body and brain feel on this new diet. I promise you, you'll feel the difference—and there will be no going back.



SIGN #3. You get sick easily (and stay sick longer)

When your immune system is weakened, you catch every cold, flu, or virus that comes down the pike. This puts your body in a constant state of attack. And its first line of defense, naturally, is...

...inflammation!

Now, inflammation is an important function in your body—it directs all those white blood cells to attack unwelcome invaders. But if you're constantly sick, aching, and in pain, that means your body is constantly on an infection-fighting rampage. And eventually, it stops being able to distinguish between the good guys and the bad guys.

The result is the kind of chronic inflammation that just, to put it very simply, gets in the way, creates chaos and makes your body start attacking itself. In fact, inflammation is one of the two major causes of dementia! When it gets out of control, it begins attacking and destroying brain cells.

There are basically 3 causes of dementia.

There are essentially three different kinds of dementia. Broken down simply, the causes are:

- Nutrients can't reach your brain (remember our conversation about how starch can starve your brain cells?) and that causes a breakdown in cell function.
- Inflammation has caused your cells to go into hyperactive mode and attack your brain.
- A combination of Type 1 & 2.

So boosting your immune system is about more than avoiding the flu—it's your first line of defense for your brain!

TRY IT: Turn down the dial on inflammation. Keep your immune system healthy by eating a diet rich in anti-inflammatory foods (most of which also happen to be the brain superfoods listed above). Eat:

- Garlic
- Onions
- Bell peppers (shoot for red)
- Tomatoes
- Berries, (especially tart cherries, one of the strongest anti-inflammatory foods)
- Walnuts
- Beets
- Maple Syrup
- Pineapple (go easy it's high on the glycemic index)
- Greens (kale and spinach especially)
- Spices like turmeric, cinnamon, and ginger

And most importantly, be sure to keep your body moving! Which brings us to...



SIGN #4: You don't even know if you own sneakers

The healthiest brains are connected to bodies in motion. In fact, studies show that aerobic exercise is one of the only way to create new neurons. The scientific journal Nature Neuroscience published a study conducted by Dr. Fred 'Rusty' Gage, who was the first to tell us that running creates more neurons. Many studies since tell us that many other aerobic exercises, anything that gets an abnormal amount of oxygen up into your brain jiggles your stems cells to create new neurons. And when you're generating new neurons, you're actively fighting the brain deterioration that leads to dementia!

Aerobic exercise has the added bonus of boosting your immune system—a great way to kill two birds with one stone. For maximum effect, you need to do some form of aerobic exercises six days a week. Frequency is just as important as intensity when it comes to your brain. However, it is crucial that you get some huffing and puffing in there—get your heart rate up and keep it up 8-30 minutes because that's how you push more oxygen into your brain and allow nutrients to penetrate more deeply.

The problem is, if we're really honest, most of us don't even know if we still own sneakers—or if they met an untimely end in last month's donation box! I don't know a single person evangelizing that exercise is bad for your health—you know you need to do it, it's just really hard to make the time for it or prioritize it.

Here's the thing. We place exercise low on the list of priorities because it's been co-opted by the weight loss world. But studies are now showing that exercise may not even play that big a role in weight loss!

The real motivation for exercise isn't for your weight—it's for your brain health. Ask yourself who you want to be. Do you want to keep growing, evolving, getting sharper? Do you want the best years of your life to still be ahead of you? Or are you resigned to letting the last years of your life slip by you?

The real motivation for exercise isn't for your weight— it's for your brain health.

Go grab those sneakers.

TRY IT: Get on the move. Power walking, swimming, biking, vinyasa yoga, pilates, and running (if you've got the knees for it) are all great ways to get your aerobic exercise in. You can even make your strength training aerobic by following a HIIT (high intensity interval training) program.



SIGN #5: You feel like you have to handle everything by yourself

Pangs of loneliness, isolation, and a growing sense of helplessness take a tremendous toll on your brain. Humans are inherently social creatures: We crave and thrive on connection. And the more isolated you feel, the more vulnerable you are to depression. And it's a well-documented fact that depression is a precursor to dementia: A worldwide test by the ENIGMA Major Depressive Disorder Group, published by Molecular Psychiatry, shows us that depression shrinks the areas of our brain—the hippocampus and the amygdala—that not only produce memory and new neurons but which serve as a key component to cognitive function.

"But Janet," you say, "I'm a capable and independent adult who likes things done a certain way—and the idea of being a burden makes me want to curl up in a little ball and disappear."

I hear you, my grandmother was the same way. Plus, I can't tell you how many times I've heard this just in general conversation. And while I understand why you feel this way, I'll tell you that what I've seen firsthand, again and again, is that people who aren't afraid to lean on their loved ones—who aren't afraid to be vulnerable—stand a much better chance of fighting off dementia. It's also those relationships and connections—that vulnerability—that gives your brain its greatest sense of purpose.

When you feel connected and capable of asking for help, you're also that much more willing to put your brain to use in helping others. The grandparent who moves in with their children is much more available and eager to help their grandkids with homework, walk the dog, and share their value with a greater collective. But the more isolated you are, the less likely you are to use your brain to problem solve, connect the dots, and stretch outside your comfort zone.

The more you pull away and isolate yourself, the more your brain shuts off.

The more you pull away, the more your brain shuts off and loses its motility. And what's a little independence and pride if it costs you your brain? Not much, I tell you.

TRY IT: Divvy up the chores. Outline the things you have to do—no matter how small—that take the most toll. Whether it's mowing the lawn, driving at night, changing the recessed lighting or other miscellaneous maintenance tasks. Then, make a list of what you can do to get out and be sociable:

Deliver lunches for meals on wheels, join a bridge club, start one or be a tutor for a bridge group (it's a dying game). Or how about volunteering for GMAT teaching or for your church youth spaghetti fundraiser supper? Reach out and find a way to ask for help and give help with at least one of your chosen chores. When you give and receive help on each of these tasks, you not only reinforce some much needed personal connection—you keep your brain firing on all cylinders.



SIGN #6: You feel like you have nothing to contribute

Do you still follow the news—or do you find yourself slapping the air and saying the whole world has gone to hell in a handbasket?

Did you spend decades holding out for retirement—only to find yourself feeling bored, isolated, and frankly, a little depressed when you got there?

The truth is, you could do everything on this list—eat the right things, detox your home, sleep well, exercise six days a week (go, you!) to generate millions of new neurons—but if you're not solving problems and connecting to your environment, your brain won't know what to do with these new neurons.

Your brain was designed to connect the dots and contribute—in fact, on a very basic level, your brain is made of billions of smaller connections that all make up a greater whole! This is a case of that old adage, “If you don't use it, you'll lose it.” And the key to building that connection is simple: Everyday, you need to complete at least one, if not many, mental accomplishments.

Okay, okay. We're not talking Nobel prize-worthy pursuits. But you do need to learn something new and solve a problem. It's not enough to read the paper or digest a daily fun fact. You need to answer a question, learn a new skill, and engage in some serious problem solving.

This is why I feel like the town crier when I tell people, “No! Please don't ever retire!” You don't have to keep the same job forever. But you should find a hobby or a career in something that interests you to pivot to while you're cashing in on that pension. Whether it's working a flower shop, learning how to become the world's best barista, or opening your own quilting booth, you need to have something every day that engages your brain in problem solving.

TRY IT: Start an exciting next step. If you had five other lives, what would you have done with them? Would you have taught scuba in Honduras, become a yoga master in an ashram in India, hosted your own talk show, been a cowboy out west, sung backup for your favorite singer? Now's your chance to dabble in those other lives! While ditching your family to wrangle cattle may not be in the cards, you could learn about and start working with horses. Start a daily yoga practice. Tutor high school algebra. Take that first baby step and keep that brain active!



SIGN #7: You don't sleep well

Okay, okay. I know I'm approximately the 235,000th person to tell you that sleep is important. You get that it's important—but you're still not prioritizing it. So let's break down why sleep is so vital for your brain, specifically. In fact, it's one of your top agents for not only fighting off dementia but also for having a fully functioning mind!

Sleep is when your glymphatic system goes to work—think of it as the deep cleaning cycle for your brain. But it doesn't go into power wash mode until you're in a deep sleep. There are five stages of sleep:

- Resting, that feeling of drifting off in the first 10–15 minutes.
- Next, your subconscious takes over. That takes another 10–15 minutes.
- The warm up for deep sleep. This is where some systems in your body shut down and others really start to ramp up.
- Time for that glymphatic system to shine! In stage four, your brain flushes toxins out of your brain and body.
- Last, but not least, is the REM cycle, where your glymphatic system takes a snooze. Your hippocampus revs up and replays your entire day trying to figure out what memories are worth keeping and which ones can be thrown away.

After you've cycled through this once, your body repeats stages 3–5 over and over until you wake up. To really flush all of the toxins out of your brain and consolidate your memories, you need to go through this cycle 4–7 times a night.

That means you need a minimum of seven hours of sleep—every night. So when you deprive yourself of sleep, it's the equivalent of letting the trash sit for an extra day or not doing the dishes. You're letting your memories float off and your brain get...icky.

TRY IT: Track your sleep. Not sure how much sleep...or quality sleep...you're getting? Try using a sleep app tracker like Sleep Cycle to get a sense of how many Zzz's you're getting. Having trouble falling asleep? Check out the Calm app's sleep stories, read by famous voices like Stephen Fry, designed to lull you to sleep!



SIGN #8: You're stressed (all the time)

You've heard of the various dangers stress poses to your immune system and heart, but if you're constantly burning the candle at both ends, your brain is also in clear and present danger.

If you have chronic stress—meaning you are constantly asking your body and brain to stay in that fight-or-flight mode—you're constantly calling on your stress hormones to be activated.

Cortisol, a stress hormone produced by your adrenal gland, in particular, can go into hyperdrive. In small and necessary doses, when you're in actual danger, cortisol is a lifesaver: It shuts down unnecessary functions and pumps up the systems in your body that can flee, fight, or freeze.

But if your system demands mass quantities of cortisol all the time, your brain cells can go into overload and wear out. Your brain won't be able to produce the energy it normally does, your mitochondria weaken, and energy to your supporting neurons tanks. Chronic stress causes your memory to fail. It's a lot like driving a car without giving it any coolant—sure, you can drive it for awhile, but eventually it's going to overheat and ruin the engine.

I know that de-stressing your life is much easier said than done: We live in demanding, chaotic times. But the best way to fight chronic stress is to build your resilience to it. Good news: Each of the previous tips given here for powering up your brain and avoiding dementia's triggers is a GREAT way to build your resilience to stress. The healthier your diet, the stronger your immune system, the more sleep you get, the healthier your connections to others—the better your body and brain will be at fending off stress.

This is especially true for anyone with a history of trauma: The toll of trauma on your body and brain, even if it's just from one isolated but cataclysmic event, doesn't end the day the trauma ends, or even weeks or months later after you think you have recovered. In short, trauma has a long, long tail.

This cuts two ways—on the one hand, trauma victims must be extra vigilant about their brain self-care, but on the other hand, I'm telling you that as a victim you have MUCH more power over how your brain responds to trauma than you think!

By practicing great brain health, you can start to rewire those pathways and, baby step by baby step, rebuild your brain and your life into new, more powerful, healthier you.

TRY IT: Find time for you. Find an activity which will take your mind off your stress. My husband calls it "vegetating" aka not thinking or worrying about anything. Find your 'vegetating' activity and carve out ten minutes a day for some deep relaxation:



- Meditate and breathe deeply
- Take a power walk around the block to clear your head
- Read for pure pleasure
- Try some yoga or tai chi (My vegetating skill is running, I mean who can think about anything else when you are grasping for breath, pushing yourself forward paying attention so you don't fall?)
- Garden, knit, baking...or engage in a hobby that's just for you!

And our last sign...



Sign #9. You feel old

Getting older is a fact of life; but feeling old doesn't have to be. I've always believed that age is more a mindset than anything else. And fact is, if you believe that the rest of your life will be a downhill slide into inevitable dementia, then that is precisely what will happen.

Can you afford to think that way? No, you cannot.

The Alzheimer's Association tells us that 1 in 10 people age 65 and over has some form of dementia—that statistic jumps to 1 in 2.5/3 people over the age of 85. Which means that as we age, Alzheimer's and other mind-vacuuming dementia diseases are waiting around the corner to suck us in. But again—only if we let it!

Are you going to let that happen? Are you going to let yourself get sick and start to slip away, resign yourself to a chair or bed or nursing home, waiting til it all comes to an end—or are you going to fight hard to stay young and sharp with a healthy body and mind?

This is a choice, and it's yours to make.

We've covered a lot of ground in the previous eight tips. But that's all the more reason why this one is so critical:

You must reset your attitude. You must decide to use your brain to its maximum capacity and live your life, and keep living it.

I'm going to fight aging lock stock and barrel, with every breath, with every step—which means I am going to make sure my brain is at its full capacity. There will be no waiting room for me.

Since you're still reading, that goes for you, too. Print this whole thing out and read it again next week. And next month.

Bottom line: Dementia is a disease, not part of normal aging. Brain fog, lack of instant recall, having no energy and constantly being sick are all symptoms that our brain is off kilter. We just need to get it powered back up.

I don't plan on seeing you in the waiting room. I'll see you at the Senior Olympics!



- Pan for plastics and aluminum.** Do a room-by-room, drawer-by-drawer scan of your home and identify what has to go, and what better quality item you can replace it with. Have your mercury dental fillings removed.
- Two steps forward, no steps back.** Add superfoods to your diet every day, and cut out hydrogenated oils, the 5 white foods (sugar, corn, rice, potato, flour) and milk. Start by slowly detoxing these ingredients over two weeks.
- Turn down the dial on inflammation.** Keep your immune system healthy by eating a diet rich in anti-inflammatory foods.
- Get on the move.** Create new brain neurons and boost your brain immune system; aerobically exercise, 6 days a week. Exercise helps mostly your brain.
- Divvy up the chores.** Outline the things you have to do—no matter how small—that take the most toll, and ask for help with those. Learn to let people help you! Also participate in activities to help others.
- Track your sleep.** Successful cleaning and repair of your brain is received with 7 to 8 hours of sleep EVERY night. Get your sleep!
- Next step.** Keep your brain churning and working, never retire it. Everyday, many times a day, accomplish something new.
- Find time for you.** Meditate or vegetate, just find and practice an activity for at least 10 minutes a day to take your mind off your stress for deep relaxation.
- Fight hard to stay young and sharp** with a healthy body and mind. You must reset your attitude. You must decide to use your brain to its maximum capacity and live your life, and keep living it.



Janet Rich Pittman is brain health advocate on a mission to help people fight the effects of aging by powering up their brains. As a Licensed Dementia Administrator and Certified Dementia Practitioner, she has seen firsthand what dementia can do to its victims and their families—and her years of research have taught her that it's possible to prevent dementia and reclaim your brain.

She is the co-founder of Gulf Coast Dementia Services, a nonprofit dedicated to advocating for senior health, and served as the Vice President of its board of directors. She is also the co-founder and co-facilitator of the Alzheimer's Dementia Support Group of South Alabama, for which she was trained and vetted by the National Alzheimer's Association. She teamed up with the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission to establish the first ever Alzheimer's/Dementia Hotline of South Alabama, a free consultation service for patients and families in need.

Janet consults with many and speaks wherever she can to get the word out about how to power up your brain, age successfully and not be vacuumed in by dementia. Invite her to speak with your group or contact her inquiring as to her one on one consultation.

www.JanetRichPittman.com

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