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# ASPEN happenings

*A community enriched by you.*

*Although there is no definitive way to prevent dementia, living a long, vibrant life may be possible by encouraging some healthy habits for the brain. It is never too late or too early to begin health and lifestyle changes.*

## Brain-Healthy Habits to Embrace

Cognitive decline can come with aging, but through healthy habits, people can reduce their risk of memory loss and dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association says that more than five million Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. By 2050, that number could rise to as high as 16 million people.

Although there is no definitive way to prevent dementia, living a long, vibrant life may be possible by encouraging some healthy habits for the brain. It is never too late or too early to begin health and lifestyle changes.

**Exercise.** Becoming more active can improve brain volume, reduce risk for dementia and improve thinking and memory skills. The journal *Neurology* found that older people who vigorously exercise performed better on cognitive tests

than others of the same age, placing them at the equivalent of 10 years younger. Increased blood flow that occurs with physical activity may help generate new neurons in the hippocampus, an area of the brain involved with learning and memory.

The Harvard Medical School says aerobic exercise may help improve brain tissue by improving blood flow and reducing the chances of injury to the brain from cholesterol buildup in blood vessels.

**Quit smoking.** The Alzheimer's Association indicates that evidence shows smoking increases the risk of cognitive decline. Smoking can impair blood flow to the brain and cause small strokes that may damage blood vessels.

**Eat healthy foods.** Foods that are good for the heart and blood vessels also are good for the brain. These include fresh fruits and



vegetables, whole grains, fish-based proteins, unsaturated fats, and foods containing omega-3 fatty acids. Neurologists state that, while research on diet and cognitive function is limited, diets, such as Mediterranean DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), may contribute to a lower risk of cognitive issues.

**Consume caffeine.** Caffeine may help boost memory performance and brain health. A *Journal of Nutrition* study found people ages 70 and older who consumed more caffeine scored *(continued page 2)*

## UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

- 8 Aspen Coffee Club, 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
- 21 Parkinson's Support Group, 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- 29 Monticello Senior Center Bingo\*, 9:30 a.m.

\*Event not at the Aspen

Please visit [www.aspenofbrookhaven.com](http://www.aspenofbrookhaven.com) to view the entire Aspen activity calendar.

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY

1 Grace Lamberson | 30 Wesley Kent

Our MISSION at the Aspen is to help each and every one of our residents thrive under our care – making connections with others, learning new things, and developing new passions.

## Brain-Healthy Habits to Embrace (continued from page 1)

better on tests of mental function than those who consumed less caffeine. Caffeine may help improve attention span, cognitive function and feelings of well-being. Information from *Psychology Today* also indicates caffeine may help in the storage of dopamine, which can reduce feelings of depression and anxiety. In addition, compounds in cocoa and coffee beans may improve vascular health and help repair cellular damage due to high antioxidant levels.

**Work the brain.** “Engaging in mentally stimulating activities can create new brain connections and more backup circuits,” states Dr. Joel Salinas, a neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, an affiliate of Harvard University. Working the brain through puzzles, reading and participating in social situations can stimulate the release of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, a molecule essential for repairing brain cells and creating connections between them.

For maximum benefit try combining a lifestyle factor with a social group. For example, take an exercise class with friends or join a book club, or maybe start a puzzling club. Remember to check with your doctor before making any significant changes in your diet and/or activity level.

## Recipe of the Month Chocolate Covered Heath Cake

### Ingredients

- 1 box milk chocolate cake mix
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 large container of Cool Whip
- 1 package of crushed Heath bar topping



### Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare and bake cake mix according to package instructions using a 9 x 13 pan. Remove from oven and let cool 10-15 minutes. Using a fork punch holes in top of cake. Pour sweetened condensed milk over the top of entire cake and allow it to soak in. Spread the cool whip over the top of the cake. Sprinkle the crushed Heath topping over the cake. You may drizzle caramel or chocolate over the top, if desired. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

## *making memories... a look back at December*

- Aspen Coffee Club
- Crazy Sock Day
- Singing Programs: BA and FPK
- Group Exercise
- Popcorn and Movies
- Bunko and Cookies
- Tylertown Christmas Lights
- Lots of Devotions and Worship
- Aspen Family Christmas
- Parkinson's Support Group
- Cookies with Santa
- Bingo
- Arts & Crafts:
  - Christmas Arrangements
  - Cupcake Liner Tree
  - Cookbook Making
  - Christmas Candy and Gingerbread Making



## Crossword Puzzles Can Improve Brain Health

*In addition to their entertainment quality, crossword puzzles can help improve cognition and brain health in individuals of all ages.*

The first known crossword puzzle to be published was created by a British journalist named Arthur Wynne, who is often credited as the inventor of crosswords. The first puzzle appeared in the New York World on December 21, 1913. The original crossword was diamond-shaped and did not feature the familiar black squares.



Throughout the years crossword puzzles grew in popularity and have evolved to the more familiar form, and certain puzzle standards were established. It is estimated that around 50 million people in America routinely partake in crossword puzzles. These tips can help improve crossword-puzzling skills.

- ◆ Practice. Practice makes perfect, even with crossword puzzles. Start with simple puzzles and work up to the more difficult ones.
- ◆ Divide and conquer. Divide the puzzle into smaller sections and complete each cluster before moving on. It's easier than completing all of the across or down clues.
- ◆ Watch "Jeopardy." Puzzles used to be comprised largely of definitions, but they now incorporate just about every subject. Improving general knowledge and perhaps watching trivia shows can help with puzzle completion.
- ◆ Learn repeat offenders. Over time you may recognize certain words appear in puzzle after puzzle. You'll soon be able to match the clues to these repeat words.
- ◆ Familiarize yourself with multiple word meanings. Remember to think like a puzzle creator, who is probably trying to stump you. The word "flower" may not imply the blooming plant. It may represent something that "flows."
- ◆ Take a break. Taking a few moments to step away from the puzzle before returning to it can clear the mind and make answers more apparent.

Visit <https://puzzles.usatoday.com> to download free crossword puzzles and MORE.

## Employee Spotlight Samantha Allen



Samantha has been a Certified Nursing Assistant for 4 years and has been part of the Aspen team for over 13 months. She enjoys cooking, cleaning, shopping, and doing activities with her family. Samantha has an infectious smile and is a dedicated team player.

*"I love my work. I really enjoy the fact that I can help keep a smile on other people's faces besides just my family. It's always the small things that will put a smile on the residents' faces. To see them smile makes me smile. Also, teamwork makes the dream work!"*

**"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.**

*-Helen Keller*

## ASPEN FACTS

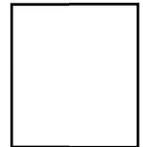
Aspen is a tree. The bark and leaf of the tree are used to make medicine. Aspen is used in combination with other herbs for treating joint pain (rheumatism), prostate discomforts, back trouble (sciatica), nerve pain (neuralgia), and bladder problems.



*More memories...*



500 Silver Cross Drive  
Brookhaven, MS 39601



*A community enriched by you.*

