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Don't let your brain health slip your mind

Common signs of brain health concerns

March 14, 2023

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Did you know that having some trouble remembering is normal? Simple things like not being able to remember where you put your keys, having trouble remembering what you need at the grocery store, or losing your eyeglasses again?

Some forgetfulness is a normal problem in our everyday, busy lives. We often are multi-tasking, making it hard to remember all the small actions we are doing.

But sometimes, forgetfulness is a symptom of something else. When should you become concerned about your brain health?

Should I be concerned?

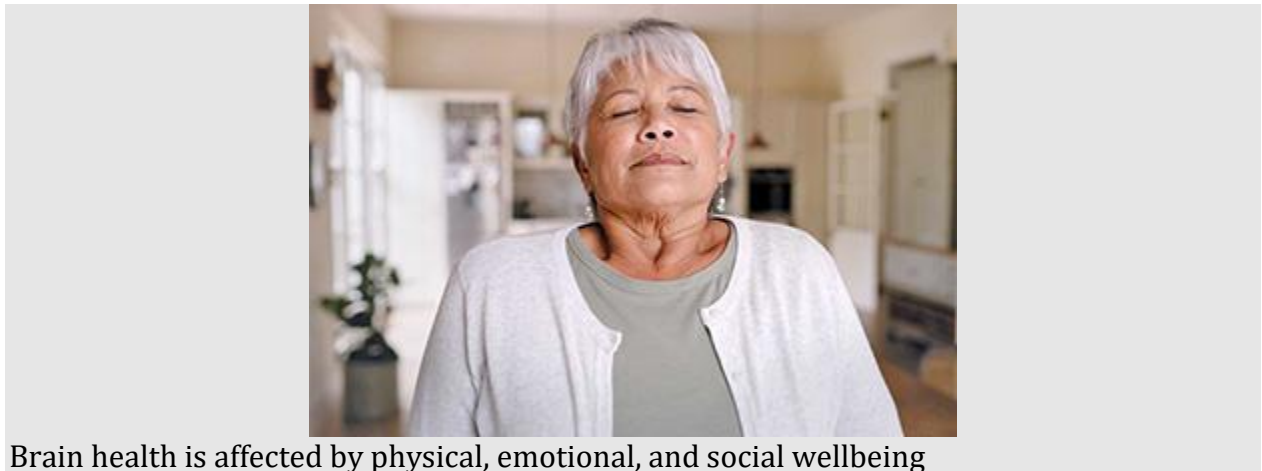
We all go through seasons in which everyday activities are difficult because of our life circumstances. Often there is no cause for concern. But certain issues that continue over a long period of time may need to be examined.

Women Veterans are at higher risk of certain conditions that may affect their brain health, such as [posttraumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#), chronic stress and traumatic brain injuries. Any type of trauma, (physical or emotional) triggered by an event, series of events, or set of circumstances, can also affect your physical, mental and brain health. All of these are common in military service and can affect the brain health of women of all ages.

It is never too early to speak with your VA primary care provider about your concerns. Some signs you may want to watch out for include:

- Difficulty with complex tasks—such as balancing your checkbook—that you used to do easily
- Trouble recalling new events or information
- Difficulty coping with unexpected events
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Trouble carrying on a conversation, following the conversation, or finding the right words

These could be signs of something more serious, like [dementia](#). Some women with brain health or memory loss concerns may also experience difficulty concentrating, having trouble planning or completing everyday activities, or feeling changes in mood or personality.



Brain health is affected by physical, emotional, and social wellbeing

What will VA do?

Your VA primary care provider will help you look at all possible issues that may be affecting your brain health. This can involve:

- Discussing your symptoms
- Discussing family history of dementia or Alzheimer's disease
- Reviewing all your medications for [medication side effects](#) that may affect brain health
- Performing a physical exam, including vision and hearing
- Conducting brief memory tests
- Ordering lab tests or imaging tests

Your provider may also discuss your military history. [Traumatic brain injuries](#) (TBIs) that may have occurred during military service may increase the risk of developing memory loss conditions or dementia, even years after the injury takes place. If you served in combat, VA will conduct screenings for TBIs and recommend follow-on care and specialty providers, as necessary.

Other factors may affect your brain health. Treating these may not only improve your brain health but your ability to complete daily activities. You or your primary care provider may want to discuss the following:

- [Vision and hearing loss](#)
- [Poor sleep quality](#) and sleep conditions, like sleep apnea and insomnia
- [Loneliness or isolation](#)
- [Certain medical concerns](#), like thyroid problems or certain vitamin deficiencies
- [Limited physical activity](#)

Treating any of the above can improve your chances of avoiding or delaying memory loss concerns like dementia.

What might my treatment be like?

If your tests show any concerns, your primary care provider will work with you and your family to create a plan to meet your needs.

Treatment may involve things like prescribing medications, referring you for eyeglasses or hearing aids, setting up an appointment with a sleep specialist or neurologist, and referring you to social work to make sure you have appropriate support systems in place.

Your safety is a primary concern, so your primary care provider may also refer you for a home safety evaluation to make sure you have the things needed to go about your activities of daily living as safely and confidently as possible.

What can I do to improve my brain health?

Our brain health is affected by our physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Some activities can improve your brain health and, while they may not prevent conditions such as dementia, they can help slow the process. Some things you can do include:

- Get [good sleep](#)
- [Exercise](#)
- Learn about [brain health](#)

How can I access care?

If you don't already have a VA primary care provider, you can call your nearest VA medical center and ask for the Women Veteran program manager. They can help coordinate the services you may need.

If you have not yet enrolled in VA health care, call or text the [Women Veterans Call Center](#) at 855-829-6636. Representatives are available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8 am to 6:30 pm ET. If you call after hours, we will return your call the next day we are open.

For more information, you can download a [handout](#) on eligibility or visit the VA [Women Veterans Health Care website](#).

Don't let your brain health slip your mind. Talk with your primary care provider early if you have any concerns about your brain health.