

2016 Survey on Healthy Behaviors and Well-Being

AARP conducted a survey among adults age 18+ to examine mental well-being among adults age 18+ and to understand the link between healthy behaviors and mental well-being . This study also sought to determine what motivates engagement in brain-healthy behaviors and which behaviors they are likely to adopt.

Survey Findings

- Mental well-being scores increase with age. Those age 54 and older have higher than average higher than average mental well-being scores (assessed on the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale). Mental well-being is low during middle age but, after midlife, it markedly improves.
- Managing stress effectively and pursuing a purpose in life are the two activities most closely-associated with mental well-being. Socializing with friends and family, learning new things, getting enough sleep, reading, and eating a healthy diet, are also consistently linked to mental well-being.
- The more brain healthy activities an adult engages in, the higher their mental well-being. Conversely, *failing to* engage in healthy behaviors (e.g. socialize, to manage stress effectively, exercise and diet, etc.) is linked to *below* average mental well-being scores.
- There is a general desire to maintain brain health driven mainly by personal motivations of independence and ongoing personal achievement/enjoyment of life. “Maintaining independence” and “maintaining overall health” are the two most-cited motivators for maintaining brain health.
- Most adults believe they can improve brain health. Eight in 10 Americans say behaviors can improve brain health and 7 in 10 say they engage in such behaviors.
- Those not engaging in brain-healthy behaviors often cite a lack of time or a lack of knowledge about which behaviors *are* brain-healthy as the reason for failing to do so. This presents an excellent opportunity for AARP and the Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH) to educate the public on what behaviors are good for brain health.
- Limiting alcohol is what the largest percentage of adults say they would do for the sake of their brain health. Other activities they would engage in include reading, various forms of increased physical activity, and prayer. Likelihood to engage in these top activities increases with age and personal experience (e.g., those knowing someone with dementia).

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Methodology: 1,609 interviews (adults age 18+) conducted online using GFK’s Knowledge Panel between March 11 and March 27, 2016. Additional interviews were conducted among African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian adults age 18+. This survey has a margin of sampling error of +/- 2%. The data is weighted to reflect Current Population Survey and American Community Survey benchmarks.