

[IMAGE]

Listening: Key to Brain Health

By Editorial Staff

Over the years, we've discussed various ways to promote brain health and avoid cognitive decline with age, including exercise, diet, sleep and more. But could something as simple as having people around you who *listen* also make a difference? Let's look at the research.

As we age, *cognitive resilience* is critical; that means our brains possess the capacity to withstand "differences in brain structure from age- and disease-related changes." If your brain lacks this resilience, you're more susceptible to cognitive decline. New research involving nearly 2,200 older adults (average age: 63 years) suggests "high listener availability" (in other words, having people around you who will listen. Among the questions researchers asked study participants, "Can you count on anyone to listen to you when you need to talk?" helped determine the degree to which participants had high listener availability.

old couples - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Study findings, published in *JAMA Network Open*, revealed that compared with low listener availability, high listener availability was associated with greater cognitive resilience. Interestingly, other forms of social support, including advice, love / affection, emotional support and sufficient contact, were not significant determinants of resilience.

No matter our age, sometimes we all just want someone who's there to listen, right? Apparently when someone is there to do so, it actually has health benefits. Cultivating relationships that stand the test of time and feature a true willingness to listen to what you have to say – it's not just a feel-good benefit, it's great for your brain as well.

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