



# The U.S. POINTER Study: What It Reveals About Protecting Brain Health

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*Sunday Health reached out to us and asked to be a guest columnist for our newsletter. Sunday Health is a medical practice dedicated to preventive, diagnostic, and ongoing cognitive care (memory and thinking abilities) for older adults. Previously, Dr. Amy Sanders of Sunday Health provided the Village with a Live and Learn session. This article is provided by their Chief Medical Officer.*

**F**or decades, we've known that lifestyle choices, such as diet, exercise, and blood pressure management, can dramatically improve heart health. Now, researchers are finding that the same is true for the brain. A landmark clinical trial published in July 2025 showed that daily habits can help protect cognitive function and may even prevent or delay dementia.

The **U.S. POINTER Study** (Protect through a Lifestyle Intervention to Reduce Risk) was launched by the Alzheimer's Association to explore whether lifestyle changes could help older adults maintain memory and thinking skills. More than 2,000 participants aged 60 to 79 enrolled, all of whom had risk factors for dementia, such as hypertension or a family history of Alzheimer's, but none had significant memory loss at the start.

Participants were divided into two groups. One received structured lifestyle support, including personalized coaching, group classes, goal setting, and regular check-ins focused on nutrition, physical activity, and social engagement. The other group received health education materials only, such as written guides and recommendations, but no ongoing follow-up or coaching.

Over a two-year period, researchers found that both groups improved, but those in the structured support group improved significantly more. They exercised more regularly, ate healthier foods, and engaged socially at higher rates. Most importantly, they showed more substantial gains in cognitive performance, especially in memory, processing speed, and problem-solving ability.

The finding was clear: information about brain healthy habits alone isn't enough. Having regular encouragement

and accountability can make a significant difference. Just as with heart health or physical exercise, it's not only about knowing what to do, it's about having the right support and encouragement to do it consistently.

The U.S. Pointer study builds on earlier work from Finland known as the **FINGER Study (2015)**, which found that combining nutrition, exercise, cognitive training, and vascular health management could slow cognitive decline. Likewise, the **Lancet Commission on Dementia** estimates that addressing **14 modifiable risk factors**, including high cholesterol and untreated vision and hearing loss, could potentially delay or prevent up to **45% of dementia cases**, underscoring the powerful role of lifestyle and prevention.

Together, these studies provide robust evidence that preventing and delaying cognitive decline is not just possible — it's actionable.

While there's still no cure for Alzheimer's disease, the U.S. POINTER Study offers a message of hope: lifestyle changes matter. Regular movement, nutritious food, strong social connections, getting and wearing hearing aids, and mental stimulation can strengthen the brain's resilience, even for people with risk factors.

And perhaps the most important lesson is one of timing. The sooner you start, the greater the potential benefit. Cognitive health, like heart health, depends on habits built over time. Whether you're already leading a brain-healthy lifestyle or just starting to think about it, small steps today can make a measurable difference in the years to come.

The takeaway is simple but powerful: start early, stay consistent,