

Dr. John DenBoer Highlights the Link Between Mental Health and Dementia

Dementia expert Dr. John DenBoer explains how depression, anxiety, chronic stress, sleep, physical activity, and social connection may influence long-term cognitive health and why early mental health care matters.



Milwaukee, Wisconsin Jul 20, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Mental health has long been recognized as an essential component of overall well-being, but growing research suggests it may also play an important role in long-term brain health. According to dementia expert Dr. John DenBoer, addressing conditions such as depression, anxiety, chronic stress, and social isolation may help support cognitive health as people age.

"Mental health and brain health are deeply interconnected," said [Dr. John DenBoer](#). "While depression or anxiety do not directly cause Alzheimer's disease, they can significantly affect memory, attention, decision-making, and overall cognitive functioning. Taking care of your emotional well-being is one of the smartest investments you can make for your future brain health."

More than 55 million people worldwide are currently living with dementia, and that number is expected to continue increasing as populations age. While age remains the greatest risk factor, researchers have identified numerous potentially modifiable lifestyle factors that influence long-term cognitive health. Mental health is increasingly recognized as one of those important areas.

One of the most significant concerns is depression. In older adults, untreated depression can produce symptoms that closely resemble dementia, including forgetfulness, slowed thinking, reduced concentration, and difficulty making decisions. Healthcare professionals sometimes refer to this presentation as "pseudodementia," because many of the cognitive symptoms may improve substantially when the underlying depression is appropriately treated.

"Too often, people assume memory problems automatically mean Alzheimer's disease," Dr. [John DenBoer](#) explained. "In reality, depression can significantly impair thinking and memory. That's why obtaining a comprehensive medical and psychological evaluation is so important whenever new cognitive symptoms develop."

Chronic anxiety and prolonged stress may also influence cognitive performance. When individuals experience ongoing stress, the body produces elevated levels of cortisol, often called the stress hormone. Although stress is a normal biological response, persistently elevated cortisol has been associated with changes in brain regions involved in learning and memory, particularly the hippocampus.

"Our brains were designed to handle short periods of stress," Dr. DenBoer said. "What they were not designed for is living in a constant state of chronic worry, uncertainty, and emotional overload."

Sleep represents another important link between mental health and cognitive wellness. Depression and anxiety frequently interfere with healthy sleep patterns, while insufficient sleep can worsen emotional health, creating a self-perpetuating cycle. During deep sleep, the brain performs critical maintenance processes that support memory consolidation and help clear metabolic waste products. Although scientists continue to investigate the exact relationship between sleep and neurodegenerative diseases, consistently obtaining restorative sleep is widely recognized as an important component of healthy aging.

Social engagement also plays a meaningful role in maintaining cognitive resilience. Individuals

experiencing depression or anxiety often withdraw from family, friends, hobbies, and community activities. Unfortunately, this isolation may further reduce opportunities for cognitive stimulation and emotional support.

"Human beings are wired for connection," Dr. DenBoer noted. "Meaningful conversations, volunteering, participating in community organizations, learning new skills, and maintaining close relationships all provide valuable cognitive stimulation while supporting emotional wellness."

Physical activity remains one of the strongest evidence-based strategies for supporting both mental health and brain health. Regular exercise has been shown to improve mood, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, enhance sleep quality, and support cardiovascular health—all of which contribute to maintaining healthy brain function throughout life.

Dr. DenBoer encourages individuals to view brain health through a comprehensive lifestyle lens rather than searching for a single solution.

"There is no magic pill that can eliminate the risk of dementia," he said. "However, we do have compelling evidence that many daily habits—including managing depression and anxiety, exercising regularly, prioritizing sleep, maintaining social connections, managing chronic medical conditions, and staying intellectually engaged—can collectively help support lifelong cognitive health."

He also emphasizes the importance of reducing stigma surrounding mental health treatment. Many adults delay seeking care because they fear being judged or assume emotional struggles are simply part of getting older.

"Depression and anxiety are medical conditions—not personal failures," Dr. DenBoer said. "Seeking professional help demonstrates strength, not weakness. Early evaluation and treatment can improve quality of life today while potentially supporting healthier cognitive aging in the future."

Experts recommend speaking with a healthcare professional if symptoms such as persistent sadness, excessive worry, sleep disruption, withdrawal from loved ones, or noticeable changes in memory and thinking continue for several weeks or interfere with daily functioning. Early assessment allows clinicians to identify potentially reversible causes of cognitive symptoms while developing individualized treatment plans.

As public awareness of dementia continues to grow, Dr. DenBoer believes conversations about prevention must also include emotional well-being.

"When we talk about protecting our brains, we often focus on crossword puzzles or supplements," he said. "Those things may have value, but we cannot overlook the fundamentals. Caring for your mental health, staying physically active, sleeping well, building meaningful relationships, and seeking help when you need it are among the most important steps any of us can take."

Dr. [John DenBoer](#) regularly educates individuals, families, caregivers, and healthcare professionals about dementia prevention, cognitive health, and healthy aging through educational presentations, digital content, and community outreach. His mission is to help people understand that while aging is inevitable, there are meaningful, evidence-informed actions everyone can take to promote better brain health throughout life.

About Dr. John DenBoer

Dr. John DenBoer is a dementia educator, former geriatric [neuropsychologist](#), healthcare executive, and speaker dedicated to advancing public understanding of brain health, healthy aging, and dementia risk reduction. Through education and community engagement, he works to translate complex neuroscience into practical strategies that empower individuals and families to take proactive steps toward lifelong cognitive wellness.



Media Contact

Dr. John DenBoer

*****@gmail.com

Elm Grove, WI 53122 United States

<https://drjohndenboer.com/>

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