



WEBINAR   
WEDNESDAYS

# How To Improve Your Thinking, Attention, and Memory

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# APRIL PROGRAMS

## COGNITION: Thinking, Attention & Memory

Webinar – April 6

*How to Improve Your Thinking, Attention and Memory*

JUMPSTART – April 21

*Get Started with a Clearer Headspace*

Your Questions Answered – April 26

*Cognition Challenges*

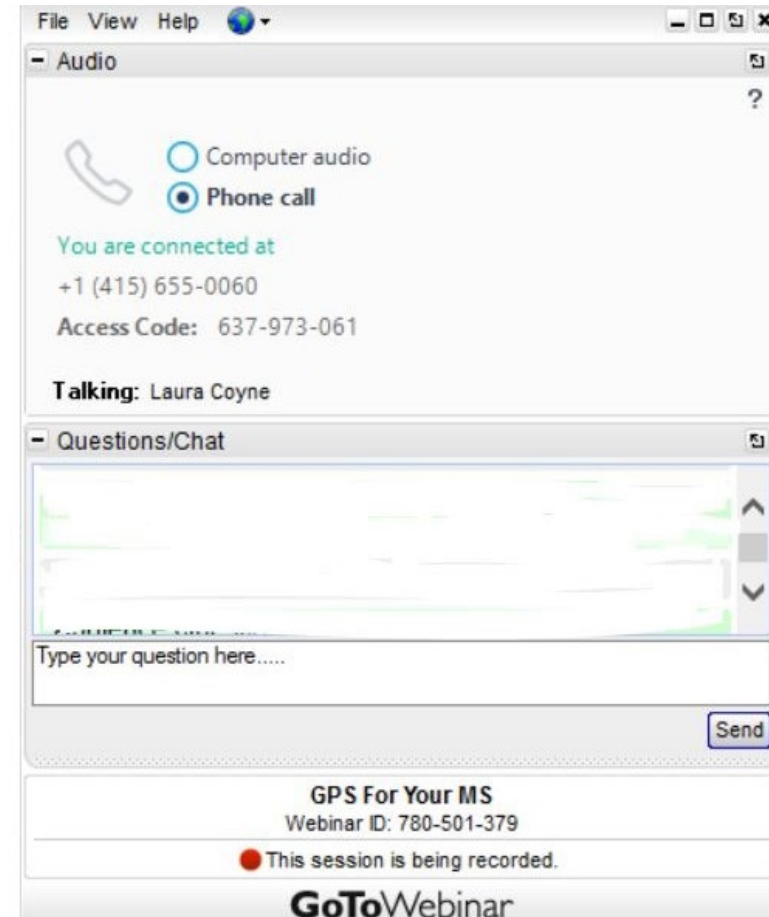
## TAKE CHARGE – Application is open

May 20 - 21

*Uncharted Territory – Finding Your Way Through  
The First Few Stages of MS*

# How to Ask Questions During the Webinar

Type in your questions using the  
**Questions/Chat** box



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Occupational Therapist  
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# Learning Objectives

1

How to recognize common cognitive challenges

2

Differentiating MS-related challenges from age-related changes

3

The role of cognitive screening vs. full testing batteries

4

Learn tips and strategies for managing daily activities

# What is Cognition?

- Cognition is your **thinking** and **mental processes**
- The way you interact with the world
- There are different types of cognition:
  - Attention
  - Executive functions
  - Memory
  - Language
  - Spatial skills
  - Word retrieval



# How Do I Detect Cognitive Issues?

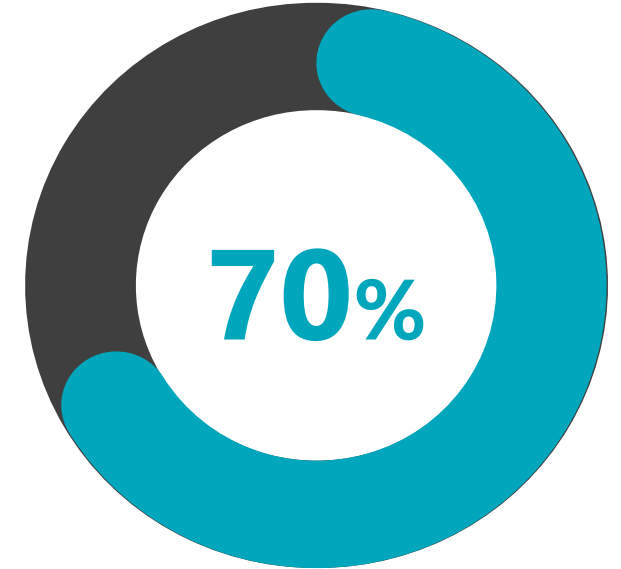
- Some things you might notice:
  - Making mistakes with bills or paperwork
  - Trouble recalling a conversation
  - Trouble finding the right word or substituting words
- We **ALL** experience some cognitive symptoms
- **Emotional states** can interfere with your best **cognitive skills**
- The best way to know for sure is to have your skills screened or evaluated





# How is Cognition Different in MS?

- Up to 70% of people living with MS have measurable problems with cognition
- Challenges can happen in any cognitive skills
- The most commonly affected skills:
  - Processing speed
  - Attention
  - Memory
  - Executive functioning
  - Word retrieval



**Typically, not ALL cognitive skills are affected!**

# Effects of Cognitive Challenges

Cognition challenges can lead to:

- Job-related issues/changes
- Driving
- Tension in relationships
- Needing help to manage tasks
- Additional stress on your support system
- People with MS are very frustrated by these “invisible” symptoms!



# Interactive Poll

Which areas of cognition are you  
having the most difficulty with?

(Check all that apply)

**Attention**

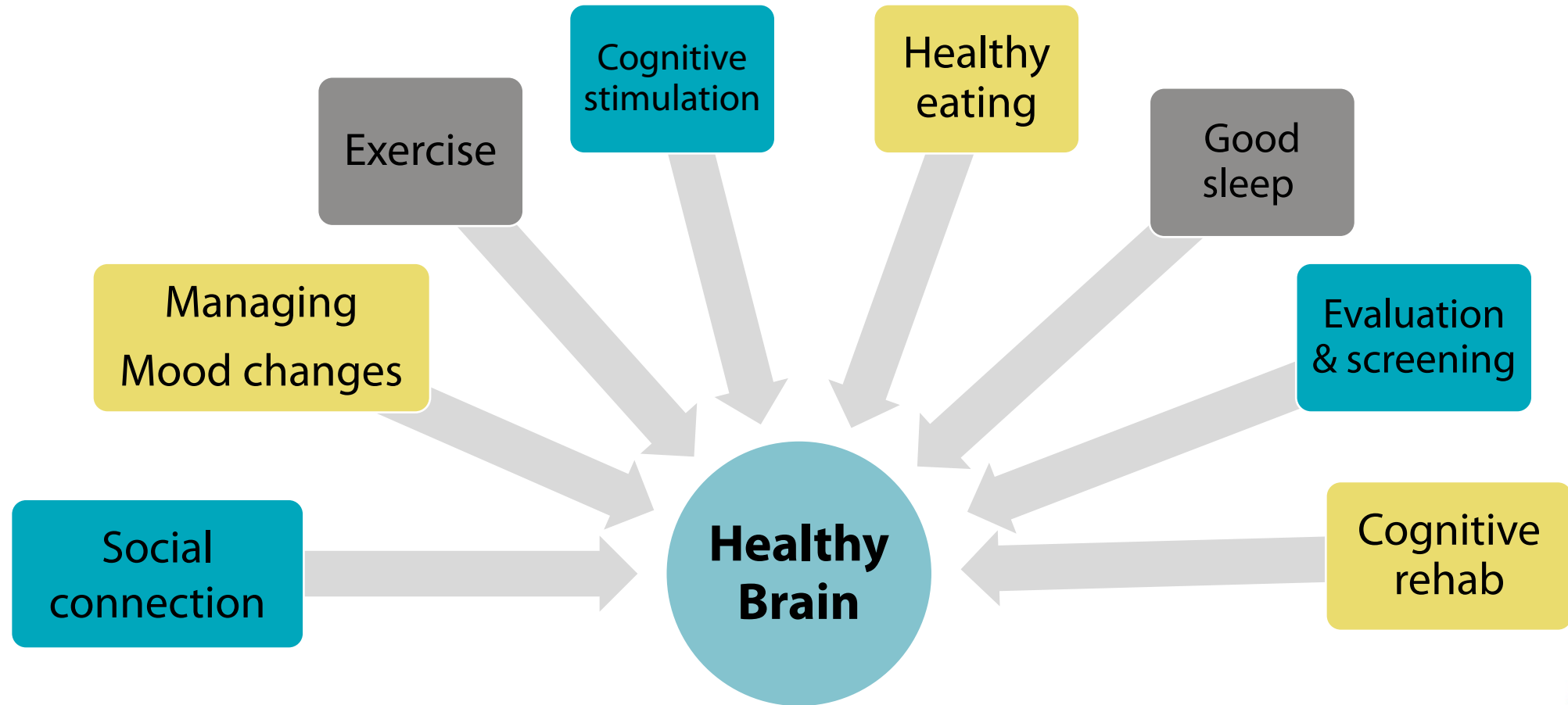
**Memory**

**Executive  
Functions**

**Word Retrieval**

**Processing  
Speed**

# What Can I Do?



# Fatigue and Cognitive Function

- **Fatigue can impact your cognitive abilities.**
- Do you notice your thinking skills decline the more fatigued you feel?

**Solution:** Energy management is one key component to optimizing your cognition. Pacing yourself throughout the day is important.

- There currently are no medications to effectively “treat” fatigue, however, there are **sleep hygiene strategies** you can use to manage it

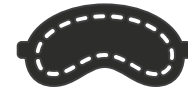
# Fatigue can impact Cognitive Function

## Sleep Hygiene Tips | The Four R's of Sleep



### Regularize

- Sleep and awake times
- Meal and exercise times
- Exposure to daylight
- Pre-sleep routine



### Ritualize

- Use the bedroom only for sleep
- Keep your space dark and quiet
- Turn off TV/radio



### Relax

- Reduce stress
- Control tension
- Utilize: yoga, stretching, journaling, praying



### Resist

- Food and drink before bed
- Intrusive thoughts
- Screen use

# Mood Changes and Cognitive Function

- Depression, anxiety, and stress can all cause or worsen cognitive issues
- These symptoms are known to cause slowed processing speed, problems with working memory, and disruption in executive functions

*The good news:* emotional symptoms **are treatable**





# Mental Health Strategies

- Early and ongoing screening is important to identify mood changes
- Intervention can take many forms

## Therapy

- Psychologist
- Counselor
- Psychotherapist

## Adaptation

- Occupational therapist
- Rehabilitation specialist

## Self Care

- Exercise
- Bubble baths
- Connecting with others



# Exercise and Cognitive Function

- **Exercise can be a powerful tool**
  - Prevents or manages vascular health conditions
  - Helps to manage MS symptoms
  - Boosts your mood
- A physical therapist can recommend an exercise regimen that's right for you

**Are you currently engaging in any form of exercise?**



# Exercise Strategies

- It is recommended to get 150 minutes of exercise per week
  - All your daily activities count toward this number including getting dressed, doing laundry, etc.
- **Weekly exercise has been proven to improve our cognitive processing skills and mood.**



**Remember! The most effective exercise is the one that you stick with.**

# Diet and Cognitive Function

- There are concerns about the health effects of a **poor or suboptimal diet** on brain health

## Directly

- Supporting chronic inflammation
- Extending recovery time after an injury
- Vitamin deficiencies

## Indirectly

- Cardiovascular or metabolic disease
- Less diverse microbiome in the gut
- Excess weight and adipose (fat) tissue



# Diet Strategies

- Few processed foods
- Prepare food at home
- Avoid saturated fats
- Increase fruit & vegetable consumption
- Increase fish consumption, decrease red meat consumption



# Aging and Cognitive Function

- We all experience cognitive changes as we age, and as we age the symptoms can occur more often
- Aging and MS can cause similar cognitive symptoms

**The strategies for managing the changes  
are the same!**

# Cognitive Learning Tips and Strategies

1. Stay organized
2. Eliminate and concentrate
3. Stick to a routine
4. Keep a calendar/daily activity log/to do list
5. Minimize distractions
6. Do complex tasks during the day when your energy/focus is the best
7. Save rote activities for later in the day when you feel slower or fatigued
8. Recruit others to help with tasks that have little margin for error

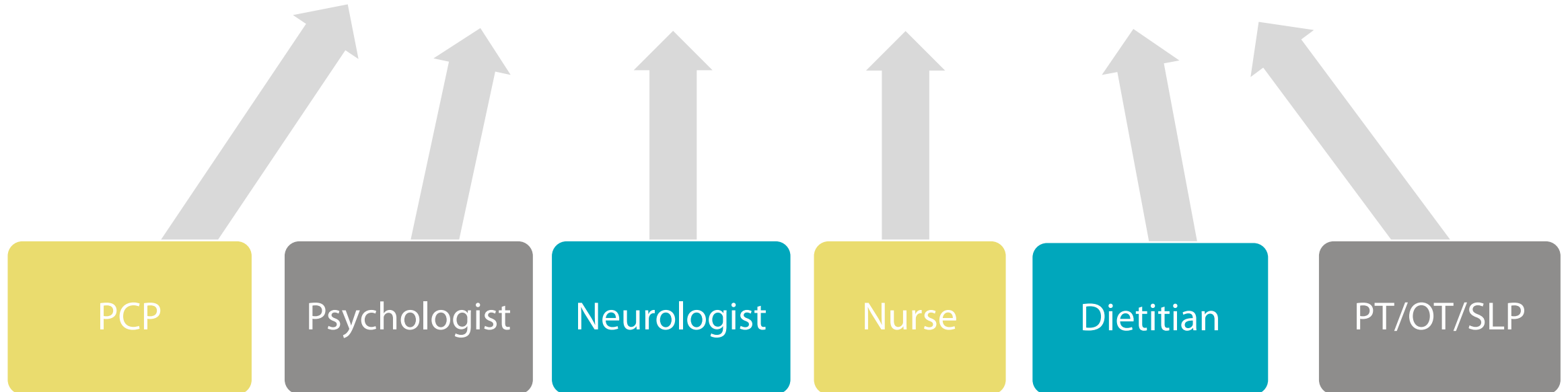
# Cognitive Rehabilitation

- In MS, our focus is on strengthening skills
- Rehabilitation may not restore someone to their pre-MS baseline, but it can help maintain brain health in the long-term
- Focus:
  - Relearn skills that were lost
  - Strengthen skills that were weak
  - Learn new skills and strategies to compensate



# Leverage Your Healthcare Team

Your Cognitive Health





# Interactive Poll

Which members of your healthcare team have you consulted with about your cognitive challenges? (Check all that apply)

Primary Care  
Physician

Psychologist

Neurologist

Nurse

I have not  
consulted with my  
healthcare team

# When to Ask for Help?

- ❑ Overpaying a bill by accident, double-paying a bill, forgetting a bill more than once
- ❑ You were the victim of a financial scam/fraud
- ❑ Mixing up medications or missing several doses of important medications
- ❑ Leaving a burner on for many hours
- ❑ Accidentally starting a fire
- ❑ Getting into trouble at work because of mistakes/errors
- ❑ Getting lost in your town while driving

# How to Ask for Help?

- Identify trusted individuals
- Ask for help in critical areas such as medications or finances
- Reach out to the **MS Navigators (800-344-4867)**:
  - How to request reasonable accommodations at work apply for disability
  - Find community services you need
  - Brainstorm ideas for how to get what you need



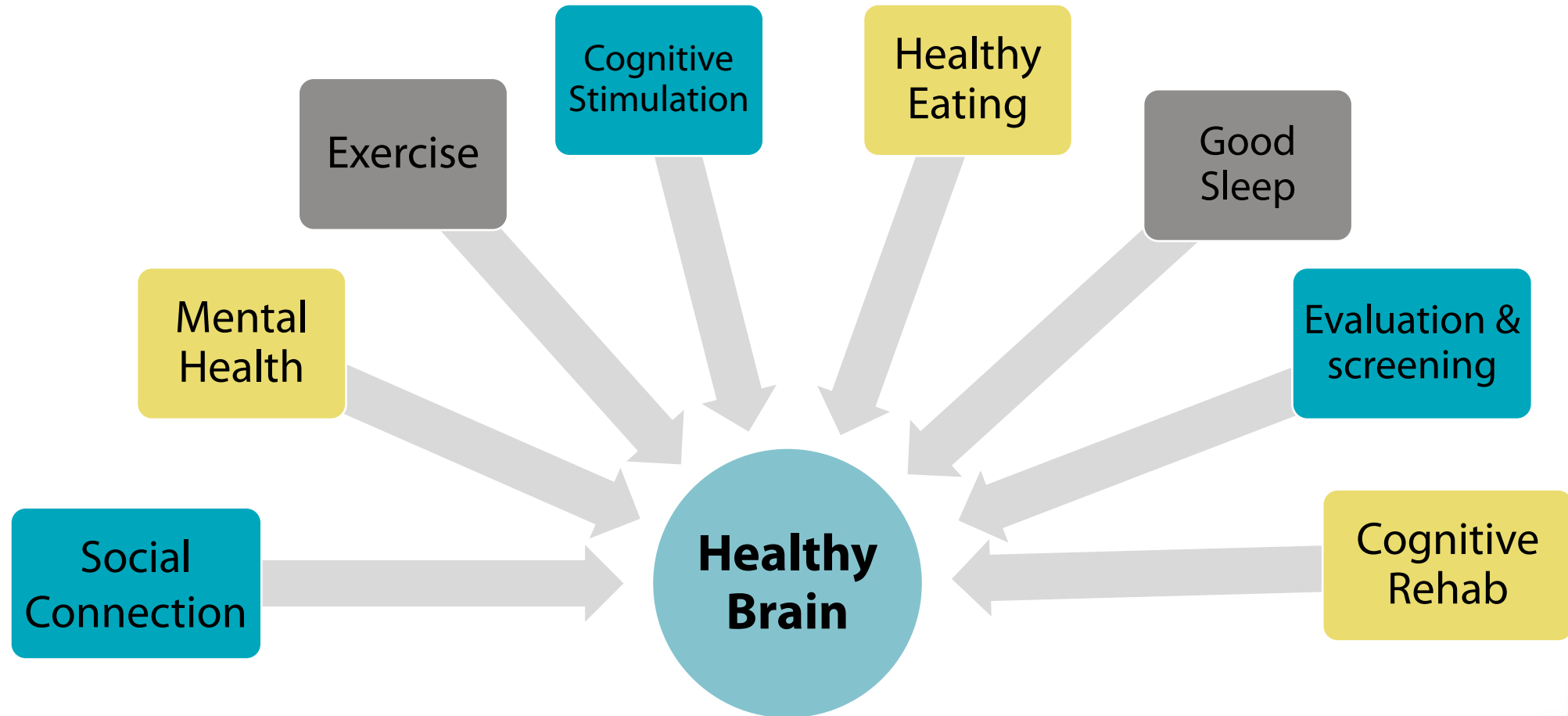
# Screening & Neuropsych Evaluation

- Getting objective information about cognition can help you determine whether the changes you notice are more than just normal aging
- Evaluation helps your providers know how to intervene and helps open up options to people who need them



**Screening at diagnosis and periodically thereafter is encouraged!**

# Key Take Aways



# Q & A





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WEBINAR   
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# Mood & Mental Health: How to Deal with Feeling Different

Wednesday, May 4 at 8pm ET

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