



# North Coast Physician

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## Cover Photo

### "Clouds Over Arcata Bottoms"

*Stephen Kamelgarn, M.D.*

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 Web page: [www.hdcms.org](http://www.hdcms.org)

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# Maintaining Brain Health

Stephen Kamelgarn, M.D.



One of the most terrifying aspects of aging is the fear that we'll lose our memories or get Alzheimer's disease. I know it scares me to death. I ask myself if there's anything I can do to prevent the onset of memory loss. I'm sure that you've all see the ads for Prevagen or Neuriva or other "brain boosters" on TV or in magazine ads. The ads for these products feed on our fears, but do they work? Unfortunately, the scientific research indicates that they don't, although Ginkgo biloba does show some promise in treating people who already suffer from dementia. Does this mean that we can't do anything to prevent memory loss and dementia? Fortunately, there are a number of things we can do to help stave off dementia, and they don't involve drugs or supplements. The first and foremost thing we can do is avoid concussions or brain trauma, says James Goodwin, director of science and research impact at Brain Health Network, and author of "Supercharge Your Brain: How to Maintain a Healthy Brain Throughout Your Life." It may be a bit late

for those of us who played football in high school, but we can still protect our skulls today and prevent further traumatic brain damage. Apart from preventing actual physical brain injury, the next most important thing we can do is "stay mentally active" — adopt new skills, learn a new language, take up a musical instrument, engage in a new hobby like painting or photography, etc. These "cognitive stimulating activities" really help improve brain function, and they're fun, besides. The key is "Keep Learning." Another thing we can do that's especially important is maintain an active social life. Humans are social animals, and we evolved in social groups. Maintaining those social connections is extremely important. According to Goodwin, if you're lonely, it's as damaging to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and drinking a bottle of vodka. In this age of COVID and lockdowns, being socially active may seem like a tall order, but even Zoom or Skype sessions are good for brain health. Good oral hygiene is also extreme-

ly important. Maintaining oral and dental hygiene reduces total-body inflammation; many inflammatory chemicals are implicated in the development of dementia. We also know that there are certain bacteria in the mouth that can actually migrate to the brain, and we find these bacteria in dementia patients. So although it sounds unusual, good dental hygiene is highly protective to the brain. Along with oral hygiene, try to keep all stress to a minimum to reduce the body's inflammatory load. Aerobic exercise, along with a regular eating and sleeping schedule, are also important in reducing inflammation. While these recommendations may not prevent dementia, they will stack the deck in your favor. Besides, they're fun and really don't cost anything.

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## **Open Forum**

Dear colleagues, I am currently doing a year long fellowship in Contemplative Medicine, and as a project for this am doing a documentary film on contemplative medicine and compassion in healthcare. I am interviewing people who provide and also those who receive care. I would like as many voices as possible, and would be

interested in your voices if you are willing to participate. It would be wonderful to have some subspecialists as well as primary care providers, hospitalists and trainees involved. The interviews will not take long. I am hoping to start them in a couple of weeks. If interested please contact me at [jheidmann@humsenior.org](mailto:jheidmann@humsenior.org) or 707-362-6704.

Here is the link to my fellowship in case you want to check it out:

[CONTEMPLATIVE MEDICINE FELLOWSHIP - New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care \(zencare.org\)](https://www.zen.org/contemplative-care)

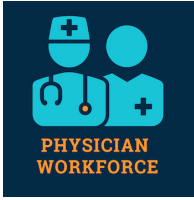


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*The Editorial and Publications Committee encourages our member's comments for publication. Please submit electronically prior to the 15th of the month preceding publication. [hdcms@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hdcms@sbcglobal.net)*

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Personal 1/2 price)  
contact Medical Society office.*

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[http://www.hdncms.org/Physician\\_Educational\\_Calendar.html](http://www.hdncms.org/Physician_Educational_Calendar.html)

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<u>SIZE</u>	<u>MONTHLY</u>	<u>SIZE</u>
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