

Help for today. Hope for tomorrow...®

Heads Up for Healthier Living

For people with dementia
and their families

Alzheimer *Society*



Living with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia can be challenging. Whether you live with dementia or you are caring for someone who does, it is important to take steps to be as healthy as you can be.

Research shows that there are many things that you can do to enhance health and quality of life when living with dementia.

Lifestyle choices such as physical and social activity can improve quality of life and improve your capacity to cope with the changes that you are experiencing.



Take Action for Healthier Living



Be Active

Physical activity can help you feel better, reduce stress and maintain health. It helps to prevent muscle weakness and health complications associated with inactivity. Physical activity also promotes better sleep and may help to improve mood. The type of activity that works best for you will depend on your fitness level, present activity level and overall health.

- Make some type of physical activity part of your daily routine.
- Choose activities and sports that you enjoy.
- Start where you can and set reasonable goals.
- Choose activity-appropriate clothing and footwear for safety and comfort.
- Consult your doctor about the kinds of physical activity that might be right for you or if you have specific health concerns.



Make Healthy Food Choices

While there are no special food requirements for people living with dementia, eating a nutritious diet that you enjoy is beneficial. A healthy diet provides the fuel and nutrients that our bodies need to function efficiently, maintain general health and provide energy.

- Eat a wide variety of colourful foods with emphasis on fruits, vegetables, protein and whole grains.

- Use Canada's Food Guide as your information source for healthy eating unless your doctor has recommended a particular diet for a medical condition such as diabetes.
- Limit salt, alcohol and caffeine.
- Drink plenty of fluids.



Stay Connected

Including meaningful social activities in your day is important for everyone but especially for

people living with dementia and caregivers. People living with dementia can become isolated and lonely. Finding opportunities to interact with the people around you will help you stay engaged. Talking to someone you trust about your feelings, hopes and worries, or simply sharing a good laugh, can provide the support and encouragement you need.

- Call or text a friend or family member; take someone to lunch or chat on the phone.
- Engage in conversations with acquaintances such as neighbours or store clerks.
- Accept invitations.
- Find a way to discuss your feelings and frustrations; consider joining a support group.
- Enjoy yourself; share activities you love with others.



Build Your Skills

Some of the activities we've already mentioned—like being physically active and socially

active—help keep your brain active. Some people find that adding creative activities, learning and practicing new skills can also help. Choosing activities that you love will keep you involved, which is good for your overall well-being.

- Vary your routine: try something new or do a familiar task in a new way such as brushing your hair with your opposite hand.
- Play games such as word puzzles, jigsaws and memory games.
- Read a book and discuss it with a friend.
- Enjoy cultural activities like going to festivals, concerts, plays, museums or galleries.
- Keep up hobbies or take up a new one.



Look after Your Health

Living with dementia brings many life changes. When we are caught up in our daily lives we don't always look after ourselves. It is important to look after your general health as you face the challenges of dementia.

- See your doctor regularly for checkups and to address specific health concerns.
- Numbers count: keep your blood pressure and (if you are diabetic) blood sugar within recommended ranges.
- Have regular vision and hearing tests. Being unable to see or hear properly can contribute to stress and confusion. Get a hearing aid if you need one.

- Visit a dentist regularly.
- Get adequate sleep; sleep deprivation can significantly impair your memory, mood and function.
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.



Reduce Stress

Whether you live with dementia or care for someone who does, this experience changes your life. You may feel stress over a variety of issues. There are a number of things you can do to manage stress. However, if symptoms of stress persist, see your doctor.

- Empower yourself by learning about dementia.
- Focus on the positive things in your life.
- Be physically active – it is a positive outlet for stress.
- Seek and accept support from family, friends and others in your situation.
- Prepare ahead to reduce the stress and anxiety caused by new or unfamiliar situations.
- Use notes, a journal or a calendar to record appointments.
- Practice relaxation, meditation, deep breathing exercises and other stress-reduction techniques.



Be Serious about Safety

Taking measures to improve your safety is part of healthy living. This is especially important as we age or experience illness.

Many accidents and falls are preventable. A conscious decision to be more aware of safety is the first step in reducing the likelihood of a fall or injury.

- Remove clutter; ensure that there is adequate lighting, especially in hallways and stairways; install handrails and reorganize cupboards to avoid use of stools or stepladders.
- Ask your doctor to review medications that may affect balance.
- Always use a seatbelt in a vehicle.
- Take extra care as a pedestrian.
- Wear protective headgear when engaging in sporting activities that could put your head at risk.
- Do exercises to improve strength, balance and flexibility.



Dementia can be challenging; however, research shows that there are real benefits to making lifestyle choices that can help you stay as healthy as you can be. By using the information and ideas in this brochure, you are taking steps to improve your health and quality of life.

Finding Help

The Alzheimer Society is here to provide information and support so that you can continue living your life to its fullest. The Society offers a range of programs and services including:

- Information about dementia, caregiving and coping strategies.
- Support from a counsellor or a support group.
- Information about services in your community that can help with practical assistance such as shopping and preparing meals.

Note: Your abilities, health situation and interests should be taken into consideration when choosing brain-healthy activities. If you have questions about your own situation, speak to your doctor or health-care provider.



Resources:

From the Alzheimer Society:

- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias: First steps for people living with dementia
- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias: First steps for families
- Heads Up for Healthier Brains: alzheimer.ca/brainhealth

Other Resources:

- Canada's Food Guide: canada.ca/foodguide
- Being active: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active.html
- By Us For Us Guide: Memory Work Out – an inspirational guide for people living with dementia. the-ria.ca/resources/by-us-for-us-guides
- By Us For Us Guide: Enhancing Wellness – an inspirational guide for people living with dementia. the-ria.ca/resources/by-us-for-us-guides



The **Alzheimer Society** is Canada's leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in communities right across Canada, the Society:

- Offers information, support and education programs for people with dementia, their families and caregivers
- Funds research to find a cure and improve the care of people with dementia
- Promotes public education and awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to ensure people know where to turn for help
- Influences policy and decision-making to address the needs of people with dementia and their caregivers

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Find out more at alzheimer.ca or contact your local Society via alzheimer.ca/find.

Alzheimer Society

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