

Spring 2020

Insight

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA

For people living with dementia

alzheimerbc.org



Now more than ever, let's unite and make memories matter

Everyone at the Alzheimer Society of B.C was looking forward to our 22 *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* events upcoming in early May. Since COVID-19 has changed our daily lives, we are no longer able to meet in person, on the day we'd planned.

We know connection is so important – particularly at a time when people feel so isolated. This is why on a new date – Sunday, May 31 – all Alzheimer Societies across Canada will unite to bring you a special event: the 2020 *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* – online. Broadcast live from 9 a.m. PDT,

the online event can be accessed from anywhere that has an internet connection.

In this issue of *Insight*, we honour some of the incredible people in our communities who are living with dementia and offer tips on how to safely get active this spring. We hope you will join us on May 31 to do both of those things – and show people affected by dementia that no matter what the world looks like, they are not alone.

Register to represent your community or learn more about the walk online by visiting walkforalzheimers.ca. Together, as Canadians, we make memories matter.

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COVID-19 and a gift as good as gold

Mario Gregorio is Insight's editor and member of the Society's Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia.

The silver lining over dark clouds allows us to appreciate the kindness of our neighbours at this very difficult time of the pandemic, COVID-19. It is an affirmation of my faith in humanity when strangers reach out and show that they care.

Beside my two-bedroom house is a residential complex filled with young couples. Before the outbreak, I would occasionally wave a hand and say good morning or afternoon as they passed by my yard when they took their children to school or walked their dogs. Aside from these pleasantries, I really do not know much about them, but on occasion when they stopped by to have a quick chat, I made them aware that I have dementia.

COVID-19 has drastically changed my daily routine. I now confine myself in my rather big backyard and keep busy by raking dried leaves, pruning branches from long-neglected apple and plum trees and taking on the often-avoided task of turning the compost pile.

On a bright, sunny day in the middle of March, I was hunched over my much-loved David Austin rose bush, tidying up broken branches and giving it a little bit of Epsom salt and fertilizer.

I heard a voice call my name and when I looked up, I saw Boss, my neighbours Rachel and Matthew's dog on a leash. The couple was close behind. "This is for you," Rachel said as she laid a small bag on the ledge of the gate. Peering through



Editor Mario Gregorio gardening

the clear plastic bag, I saw about a dozen face masks and a bright pink note with two telephone numbers. "Please do not hesitate to call, just in case," were Mathew's words. I felt that I just received a gift that is as good as gold.

As I look back on that morning faced with the grim reality of events now unfolding in our community, I am reassured that I will be alright. I am comforted by the thought that I am surrounded by caring neighbours and that I am not alone.

Advice from Mario:

- If you are sick, stay home.
- Do not gather in groups.
- Play games with others online and through apps.
- Stay two meters away from others.
- Work from home.
- Have virtual hangouts with friends and family via video calls.
- Go for a well spaced walk with your family or those in your household.

Get moving! The link between exercise and brain health

According to research, people who exercise regularly are less likely to develop heart disease, stroke and diabetes, which are all linked with an increased risk of dementia. Physical activity can also improve mood and confidence, reduce the risk of falls by improving strength and balance and help to keep bones strong. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend adults engage in at least 150 minutes of aerobic physical activity per week, in sessions of 10 minutes or more at a time.

Spotlight on B.C. research

A recent publication by a team including UBC researcher Dr. Teresa Liu-Ambrose and PhD candidate Ryan Falck looked at the role of exercise training on physical and brain function among older adults.

What type of study was it?

This study was a systematic review and meta-analysis, meaning it was a review of existing research studies to provide a summary and assessment of overall research on the topic.

What did they find?

The researchers found that exercise is effective in promoting both physical and brain health in older adults.



The team found that regular exercise brings benefits regardless of age or sex.

What are the recommendations?

The researchers recommend doing a mix of aerobic and resistance training. Aerobic training includes walking, running or dance, while resistance training is focused on increasing muscular strength or endurance by using items like weights or resistance bands.

“The body and the brain are connected and what happens in the body impacts the brain,” Falck says. “Even in older adults with less mobility, low-intensity physical activity is shown to be beneficial. Anyone can start any time to begin seeing improvements in thinking, moving and overall well-being.”

Exercise tips

- Add intensity to exercise where possible. This can be as simple as choosing a walking route with hills or speeding up the pace, periodically.
- Choose activities you enjoy! Some possibilities you may wish to try are walking, gardening, seated exercises, yoga, dance or tai chi/qigong.
- There are many free exercise videos available on websites like YouTube which you can do at home!
- Consult your doctor before starting a new exercise routine. If an exercise is painful or makes you feel unwell while taking part, stop the exercise and seek medical advice.

Peter and Susan: Keeping fit and making friends on the road

Peter Gook and Susan Martin live in Salmon Arm and enjoy travelling to participate in races. The couple bonded over their love of long-distance running, which remains at the centre of their active lifestyle.



Susan Martin and Peter Gook

If you saw Peter Gook and Susan Martin running through the streets of Salmon Arm, you'd never guess Peter is living with Alzheimer's disease. It's a fact the self-reliant ex-military man, who still loves his work life, travels the world with his wife and regularly runs 10k races, struggles to accept.

"I was absolutely shocked," says Peter, who first accused his doctor of lying to him. "You have this idea of what someone with

Alzheimer's is like and when it happens to you it's totally different."

That idea that so many people have of what someone living with dementia is like – that a person is no longer capable of doing all the things they did before they developed the disease – is what motivated Peter and Susan to drive all the way to Vernon to access Alzheimer Society of B.C. resources, rather than connect with the Society's resources in Salmon Arm.



At first, Peter held off sharing his diagnosis with people in his own community because he feared that stigma would jeopardize his business as a locksmith. Peter and Susan are now ready to bring more visibility to dementia, to motivate people who may be struggling with their diagnosis to reach out for support and to know that they're not alone in their community.

"We have such an opportunity to make people aware and have a positive impact," Susan says. "People need to know. We need to know what we can do to slow it down or to one day stop it because it's affecting so many people."

Exercise, diet and social engagement are the tools Peter and Susan are using to try to slow down the progression of the disease and live as well as possible. As a military police officer, Peter used to run because he had to. Now he runs because he loves to. Long-distance running is a shared passion for Peter and Susan, who regularly travel for races and fondly look back on running with Dylan, their late terrier, who was named in honour of Bob Dylan. Continuing to run, Peter says, is his biggest accomplishment, and something he plans to do until the day he dies. Peter and Susan both love to stay fit, but more than that, they love the community and the characters they encounter on their runs.

"You meet all kinds of nice people and if they find out you have Alzheimer's, they don't care," Peter says. "They're just happy to see you out there."



Peter and Susan also attend the Society's Minds in Motion® program, as well as support groups for caregivers and people in the early stages of the disease. For Peter, attending the groups is important – but not easy when it comes to watching the progression of the disease and the death of other group members. Why some people go so quickly, he says, while others keep fighting through the disease is something he grapples with.

"Sometimes it's still hard for me to realize that I have Alzheimer's," he says. "I would like it to go away, but it's not going to. I have to live with it."

"You are," Susan adds.

Learn more

To learn about more healthy lifestyle choices to help improve brain health, check out alzbc.org/brain-health.

Donna and Mike: Making their voices heard



Donna and Mike Wager

Mike and Donna Wager always had a vision for their retirement. They would work hard, save and when the time was right, pack up and move their life from North Delta to a small town in the Interior. In 2017, they realized their dream when they moved to Oliver. They built a weekly routine which made use of the leisurely activities their new southern Okanagan community had to offer, and Donna began volunteering with the University of Victoria's Centre of Aging. Oliver was the type of community Mike had always pictured when dreaming about retirement.

One day, a year into their new lives, Mike received a phone call informing him that Donna had not arrived for her usual volunteer shift: she had lost her way to the centre. This incident prompted a series of appointments which eventually confirmed that Donna was living with dementia.

Receiving the diagnosis was scary for Donna, who was worried how the disease would change her and afraid of the uncertainties the diagnosis brought.

Together, Donna and Mike sought information as a remedy for their fear. "I wanted to make sure I wasn't reacting based on preconceived notions about dementia," Donna says. "I wanted to meet other people who were having the same experience."

After connecting with the Society's First Link® dementia support program, the couple began attending support groups near Oliver over the next year before making the difficult decision to move back to North Delta. Donna explains, "It was important to be close to family. We received excellent support in Oliver, but they weren't family. My family is here in North Delta and Surrey."

It was with this return home that the couple became more involved with the Society. Mike and Donna became members of their local support groups for caregivers and people living with dementia, then after finding out that *White Rock's IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* committee was seeking volunteers, the couple joined the team.

"It is very important to me to raise awareness because it has such an impact on peoples' lives – not only the person diagnosed with the disease, but their families and friends as well," Donna says.

Volunteering on the committee was the perfect opportunity for Donna to advocate for early diagnosis, encourage people living with dementia to gather information and be open with friends and

family. She says, "I tell folks to watch me in my daily experience with Alzheimer's and encourage them to ask me questions about my personal journey. That's why I think the *Walk* is such an important and powerful social activity; it raises awareness of a devastating disease in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere."

Donna and Mike make a great team. They are maintaining a sense of humour and creating systems to help accomplish daily tasks. By employing these systems, Donna plans to continue her volunteering and advocacy activities as long as she can. Volunteering, raising awareness and having conversations about dementia are all part of Donna's personal mission to build more dementia-friendly communities as she continues her own journey.



Join us at the *Walk*!

Join us online for the 2020 *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* on May 31. Learn more at walkforalzheimers.ca.

Activities to try while physical distancing

The physical distancing requirements for COVID-19 bring unique challenges, including isolation and disruption to normal routines. Here are a few ideas of activities to engage in from the safety of your own home that can help you remain cognitively stimulated and engaged.

At home

- Try a new baking or cooking recipe with those you live with – or call a friend while you're both cooking at your own houses!
- Read a favourite novel or listen to it as an audiobook through Audible.ca or Scribd.com, online or through apps
- Connect with friends and family members via phone calls, video chats or writing letters.

In your own backyard

- Take a walk around your neighbourhood with a member of your household – just make sure you give other walkers lots of physical space. Look for details you haven't noticed before. Try looking for different colours or numbers on your walk or seeing how many of one item you can find (i.e. locksmith stickers, bird nests, fallen branches, red cars, etc.).
- At nighttime, download a stargazing application for your smartphone to help you identify the stars in the night sky. Or, look up upcoming space station sighting opportunities for your location on NASA's Spot the Station website.
- Create a bird feeder and watch the birds that visit.

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- Subscribe online at alzbc.org/insight-newsletter
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742

Contribute

We welcome contributions, such as personal stories, photography or original poems, from people living with dementia. Please provide your name, mailing address, phone number and/or email address if you would like to be contacted. All submissions will be considered based on theme and space.

- Email insight@alzheimerbc.org
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742
- Mail to the Alzheimer Society of B.C., care of *Insight*:
300-828 West 8th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

Call the First Link® Dementia Helpline

A confidential, province-wide support and information service for anyone with questions about dementia. Our English Helpline hours have been extended and now run from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m., Monday to Friday. Cantonese or Mandarin and Punjabi Helplines are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday.

- English: 1-800-936-6033
 - Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003
 - Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
- Email supportline@alzheimerbc.org

Are you a caregiver?

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