

Help for today. Hope for tomorrow...®

# Heads Up for Healthier Brains

What everyone  
should know about brain  
health and dementia

Alzheimer *Society*



Your Brain & Good Health

# Make the Connection

The brain is one of your most vital organs, playing a role in every action and every thought. Just like the rest of your body, it needs looking after.

It's never too early or too late to make changes that will maintain or improve your brain health—changes that may also help reduce your risk of developing dementia.



## Reducing Your Risk

Dementia can develop when the risk factors for dementia combine and reach a level that overwhelms the brain's ability to maintain and repair itself. So reducing as many of the risk factors as you can is a good idea.

By making healthy lifestyle choices, you may be able to reduce your risk of dementia and improve your brain's ability to maintain long-term health.

Will healthy lifestyle choices prevent dementia? There are no guarantees, but evidence suggests that a healthy lifestyle helps the brain maintain connections and even build new ones. That means that a healthy brain can handle illness better. So take action today.

There are some risk factors you can't control, such as your genetic makeup and growing older. However, there are still many risk factors that you do have control over. Here are some practical actions you can take to improve your brain health.



# Take Action for a Healthier Brain

What can you do to maintain or improve your brain health?

## Challenge Your Brain



Keep your brain active every day. Challenging your brain regularly may reduce your chances of developing dementia.

- Try something new or change the way you usually do a task, such as brushing your hair with your less dominant hand.
- Play games to challenge your mind—chess, cards, word or number puzzles, jigsaws, crosswords and memory games.
- Pursue a new interest, learn a language, play a musical instrument, take a course, visit galleries and museums, or enjoy old and new hobbies.

## Be Socially Active



Staying connected to others keep your brain healthy. Social interaction appears to have a protective effect against dementia. Pick up the phone, stay connected to family and friends, and get together with

your neighbours. Spend time with people who have a positive outlook. The more engaged you are, the better.

## in

# ove your brain health?

- Enjoy events with family and friends.
- Stay active in the workforce, and if you cannot, become a volunteer.
- Join an exercise group, a book club or a hobby group.

## Choose a Healthy Lifestyle



A healthy lifestyle is as important for brain health as it is for the rest of your body. Diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity are some examples of risk factors for dementia. But many simple lifestyle choices will improve your brain health.

- Make healthy food choices: eat a varied diet rich in dark-coloured fruits and vegetables. This includes foods rich in antioxidants, such as blueberries and spinach. Omega 3 oils found in fish and canola oils are also great choices.
- Be active: regular physical activity helps to maintain heart health and can significantly reduce the risk of heart attacks, stroke and diabetes.
- Track your numbers: keep your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and weight within recommended ranges. If you have diabetes, it is important to manage it well.
- Reduce stress: practice relaxation, meditation or other stress reduction techniques.

- Choose wisely: quit or avoid smoking and avoid excessive alcohol consumption.
- See your doctor regularly: schedule appointments for both checkups and any specific health concerns. Your doctor is an important partner in maintaining your health.

## Protect Your Head



Brain injuries, especially repeated concussions, are risk factors for dementia. By protecting your head, you are caring for your brain today and in the future.

- Avoid activities where you might put your brain at risk of harm.
- Protect against concussions by avoiding falls. Check your house for safety hazards: install handrails, arrange for snow removal and put away rugs.
- Drive safely and wear a seatbelt.

# Aging and Genetics

Two risk factors cannot be controlled: aging and genetics.

## **Aging**

Dementia is not a normal part of aging, but age is the strongest known risk factor for dementia. It is well-established that aging can impair the body's self-repair mechanisms, including those in the brain. Many of the heart-related risk factors for dementia increase with age, such as high blood pressure, heart disease and high cholesterol.

After the age of 65, the risk of developing dementia doubles approximately every five years. Dementia also affects people under 65. Some people may develop dementia in their 40s and 50s, or even in their 20s and 30s, called young onset dementia.

## **Genetics:**

There is no doubt that genetics play a role in dementia. Yet only a small percentage of cases are associated with family history. Risk genes increase the likelihood of developing dementia, but do not guarantee it will happen.



## Additional resources

Alzheimer Society of Canada. Brain-healthy tips to reduce your risk of dementia.

[alzheimer.ca/brainhealth](http://alzheimer.ca/brainhealth)

Alzheimer Society of Canada. Heads up for healthier living. [alzheimer.ca/challenge](http://alzheimer.ca/challenge)

Government of Canada. Canada's food guide. [canada.ca/foodguide](http://canada.ca/foodguide)

Government of Canada. Concussion: Prevention and risks. [canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/concussion-sign-symptoms/concussion-prevention-risks.html](http://canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/concussion-sign-symptoms/concussion-prevention-risks.html)

Government of Canada. Physical activity and your health. [canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active/physical-activity-your-health.html](http://canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active/physical-activity-your-health.html)



## Give someone you care about a *Heads Up* today

It's never too early or too late to make lifestyle changes to help improve your brain health and to reduce your risk of dementia.

If you are living with dementia, taking care of your brain health may also improve your quality of life and even help manage the symptoms of dementia.



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](https://alzheimer.ca)  
or contact your local Society at  
[alzheimer.ca/find](https://alzheimer.ca/find).

# Alzheimer Society

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[alzheimer.ca](https://alzheimer.ca)



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