Heads Up for Healthier Brains

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 Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias. It is well-established that aging can impair the body’s self-repair mechanisms, including the brain. Many of the cardiovascular risk factors increase with age, such as high blood pressure, heart disease and high cholesterol. After the age of 65, the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease doubles approximately every five years. Dementia also affects people under 65. Some people may develop dementia in their 40s and 50s known as young onset dementia.

Genetics: There is no doubt that genetics play a role in the disease. Yet, only a small percentage of cases are associated with specific genes that cause the inherited form of the disease. Risk genes increase the likelihood of developing a disease, but do not guarantee it will happen.

Heads Up for Healthier Living brochure (for people with the disease and their caregivers) – Alzheimer Society of Canada

Canadian Standards Association (CSA) for information on helmet safety and suppliers. www.csa.ca

Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating. www.canada.ca/foodguide

Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living www.canada.ca/env/public-health/services/health-promotion/healthy-living/physical-activity.html

Additional Materials or References:

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Charitable registration number: 11878 4925 RR0001

Alzheimer Society

What everyone should know about brain health and dementia

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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 Alzheimer’s disease or another dementia, so it is important to give your brain a regular workout.

- 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, enjoy old and new hobbies.

**Choose a Healthy Lifestyle**

A healthy lifestyle is as important to brain health as it is to the rest of your body. Diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and obesity are all 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, including foods rich in anti-oxidants, such as blueberries and spinach; and omega 3 oils found in fish and canola oils.
- Be active: regular moderate physical activity helps maintain cardiovascular health and can significantly reduce the risk of heart attacks, stroke and diabetes.
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- Enjoy events with family and friends.
- Stay active in the workforce or become a volunteer.
- Join an exercise group, a book club or hobby group.
- Choose wisely: quit or avoid smoking and avoid excessive alcohol consumption.
- See your doctor regularly: both for check ups and any specific health concerns. Your doctor is an important partner in maintaining your health.

**Be Socially Active**

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**Protect Your Head**

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- Wear an approved helmet when engaging in sporting activities such as skating, skiing, skateboarding, rollerblading and cycling.
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Reducing Your Risk

Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias develop when the risk factors for the disease combine and reach a level that overpowers the brain’s ability to maintain and repair itself. So reducing as many of the risk factors as you can makes good sense. By making healthy lifestyle choices, you may be able to reduce your risk and improve your brain’s ability to sustain long-term health.

Will healthy lifestyle choices prevent Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias? 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 withstand illness better. So take action today.

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Make the Connection
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