

## 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.



### Additional Materials or References:

- [www.alzheimer.ca/brainhealth](http://www.alzheimer.ca/brainhealth)
- *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](http://www.csa.ca)
- Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. [www.canada.ca/foodguide](http://www.canada.ca/foodguide)
- Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active.html)

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

It's never too soon, or too late to make the lifestyle changes necessary to help improve your brain health, changes that may also help to reduce your risk for Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.

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



The Alzheimer Society is the leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in communities 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 Alzheimer's and their caregivers

Help for today. Hope for tomorrow...®

# Heads Up for Healthier Brains

What everyone  
should know about brain  
health and dementia

Alzheimer Society

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# 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 soon, or too late, to make changes that will maintain or improve your brain health, changes that may also help reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.



### Reducing Your Risk

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias develop when the risk factors for the disease 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 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.

Some risk factors you can't control, such as your genetic makeup and growing older, but there is a lot you can do that may help reduce your risk of getting dementia. 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 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.

#### Be Socially Active

 Staying connected socially helps you stay connected mentally. Social interaction appears to have a protective effect against dementia. Pick up the phone, stay connected to family and friends, get together with your neighbours. Spend time with people who have a positive outlook. The more engaged you are, the better.

- 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 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.
- 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: both for check ups 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. We suggest you:

- Wear an approved helmet when engaging in sporting activities such as skating, skiing, skateboarding, rollerblading and cycling.
- Protect against concussions by avoiding falls. Check your house for safety hazards: install handrails, arrange for snow clearance and throw out the scatter rugs.
- Drive safely and wear a seatbelt.