

## Healthy Brain, Cognitive Function and Outdoor Walking

**By: Diana Primavesi, Public Education Coordinator**

Spring is in the air and everybody is spending more time outdoors. For people with dementia, it may be more difficult to get out and enjoy the sunshine. Individuals may have had a long-time habit of getting out for a walk, but often concerns arise when a person has dementia. This is because we know that getting disoriented in a familiar place is a common experience for people as their illness gets worse.

Walking is an excellent form of exercise, with lots of proven health benefits. There is also evidence that walking can help improve cognitive function. As a result, walking is recommended as a “healthy brain” strategy. Many people find that getting out of the house has a positive effect on their mood. And the physical exertion can help a person release extra energy and may result in decreased anxiety and restlessness.

Here are some strategies that you can use to continue to enjoy walking while reducing the risks.

- 1) Plan a route and use it regularly. Sticking to the same route every time can help you remember.
- 2) Carry a cell phone so you can call a family member or friend if you get lost. Tape the phone number on the back of the phone or have it preprogrammed.
- 3) Walk with a friend or neighbour. Taking a buddy along can help reduce anxiety about the possibility of getting lost. Walking with somebody also provides social interaction which is also recommended as a “healthy brain” strategy.
- 4) Take identification with you. Carry a wallet card with your name, address and phone numbers of family or friends. Register for the MedicAlert® Safely Home® program and wear the bracelet every day so that if there is a problem, somebody can help you reconnect with family or friends.
- 5) Join a walking group. Many communities have walking groups and the Alzheimer Society offerings the Step Out Walking Club in Peterborough and Lindsay. If you are interested, contact the office for more information.
- 6) Be aware of the weather conditions and make decisions accordingly. For example, if it's very hot or there is poor air quality you may want to walk in the morning or evening.
- 7) Be prepared. Make sure that you are dressed appropriately for the weather. Consider taking along a small snack and some water.

### Peterborough/Northumberland Office:

183 Simcoe ST, K9H 2H6 :  
705-748-5131 or 800-561-2588,  
Fax: 705-748-6174

### Lindsay/Haliburton Office

55 Mary ST W, Suite 201, K9V 5Z6  
705-878-0126 or 800-765-0515,  
Fax: 705-878-0127

WEB SITE: [www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh](http://www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh) • EMAIL: [info@alzheimerjourney.ca](mailto:info@alzheimerjourney.ca)

CHARITABLE REGISTRATION NUMBER 12939 7980 RR0001

# Alzheimer Society

PETERBOROUGH, KAWARTHA LAKES, NORTHUMBERLAND & HALIBURTON

In the four counties area, we are fortunate to live in communities with wonderful outdoor spaces. By using these simple strategies, you can continue to get out walking and enjoy the outdoors.

For more information about healthy brain strategies, visit our website at:  
[www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh](http://www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh)

Peterborough/Northumberland Office:

183 Simcoe ST, K9H 2H6 :  
705-748-5131 or 800-561-2588,  
Fax: 705-748-6174

Lindsay/Haliburton Office

55 Mary ST W, Suite 201, K9V 5Z6  
705-878-0126 or 800-765-0515,  
Fax: 705-878-0127

WEB SITE: [www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh](http://www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh) • EMAIL: [info@alzheimerjourney.ca](mailto:info@alzheimerjourney.ca)  
CHARITABLE REGISTRATION NUMBER 12939 7980 RR0001