

Argue for your  
limitations,  
and sure enough  
they're yours.

—Richard Bach

A vertical bar with a red-to-white gradient, containing a large white number 3.

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# 3

## MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH

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### IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:

- important health numbers such as blood pressure
- the importance of what you eat and drink
- the importance of exercise, with suggestions
- the importance of managing stress
- how depression can be a problem
- suggestions on working with your doctor

The brain is an organ of your body and is affected by your general health. Having an illness that is causing dementia makes it even more important to take care of your health. This will be vital in enhancing your quality of life. There are many elements of living that contribute to general health, also referred to as “wellness.” Some of these will be outlined in the following pages.

### HEALTHY NUMBERS

There are some health numbers that you may have been monitoring with your physician to make sure you are as healthy as possible, for example, your blood pressure. As we age, health targets for those numbers change. Targets change because what was helpful when you were younger may not be beneficial now that you are older.

Do you know your blood pressure? Or blood sugar? Or your weight? More importantly, do you know whether you are meeting the targets your doctor has set specifically for YOU in each of these areas?

If you are unsure, talk to your physician.

## NUTRITION

A healthy diet that is good for your heart and circulation is also good for your brain! High cholesterol is thought to lead to stroke and brain-cell damage. Diabetes is also thought to significantly increase your risk of developing dementia.

### The Canada Food Guide Recommendations

The recommended number of Food Guide Servings per day is as follows

|                                | <b>ADULTS</b>  |              |                |              |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>AGE IN YEARS</b>            | <b>19-50</b>   |              | <b>51+</b>     |              |
| <b>SEX</b>                     | <b>Females</b> | <b>Males</b> | <b>Females</b> | <b>Males</b> |
| <b>Vegetables &amp; Fruit</b>  | 7-8            | 8-10         | 7              | 7            |
| <b>Grain Products</b>          | 6-7            | 8            | 6              | 7            |
| <b>Milk &amp; Alternatives</b> | 2              | 2            | 3              | 3            |
| <b>Meat &amp; Alternatives</b> | 2              | 3            | 2              | 3            |

## What is one Food Guide Serving? Look at the examples below:

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Vegetables &amp; Fruit</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>fresh, frozen or canned vegetables</b> 125ml (1/2 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>leafy vegetables</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» cooked: 125ml (1/2 cup)</li> <li>» raw: 250ml (1 cup)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>fresh, frozen or canned fruits</b> 1 fruit or 125ml (1/2 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>100% juice</b> 125ml (1/2 cup)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Grain Products</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>bread</b> 1 slice (35g)</li> <li>▪ <b>bagel</b> ½ bagel (45g)</li> <li>▪ <b>flat breads</b> ½ pita or ½ tortilla (35g)</li> <li>▪ <b>cooked rice, bulgur or quinoa</b> 125ml (1/2 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>cereal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» cold: 30g</li> <li>» hot: 175ml (3/4 cup)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>cooked pasta or couscous</b> 125ml (1/2 cup)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Milk &amp; Alternatives</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>milk or powdered milk</b> (reconstituted) 250ml (1 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>canned milk</b> (evaporated) 125ml (1/2 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>fortified soy beverage</b> 250ml (1 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>yogurt</b> 175g (3/4 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>kefir</b> 175g (3/4 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>cheese</b> 50g (1 ½ oz.)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Meat &amp; Alternatives</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>cooked fish, shellfish, poultry, lean meat</b> 75g (2 ½ oz.)/125ml (1/2 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>cooked legumes</b> 175ml (3/4 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>tofu</b> 150 g or 175ml (3/4 cup)</li> <li>▪ <b>eggs</b> 2 eggs</li> <li>▪ <b>peanut or nut butters</b> 30ml (2 tbsp)</li> <li>▪ <b>shelled nuts and seeds</b> 60ml (1/4 cup)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Oils &amp; Fats</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Include a small amount—30 to 45ml (2 to 3 tbsp)—of unsaturated fat each day. This includes oil used for cooking, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise.</li> <li>▪ Use vegetable oils such as canola, olive, and soybean.</li> <li>▪ Choose soft margarines that are low in saturated and trans fats.</li> <li>▪ Limit butter, hard margarine, lard, and shortening.</li> </ul>     |

**EXERCISE**

Make it regular, varied, and enjoyable! Exercise can help keep your weight and blood pressure down. The variety of physical activity can be as important as the type of exercise. Exercise has a positive effect on your emotions because of the chemicals that are released when you exercise.

Exercise does not need to be a chore. Any activity that involves moving your body is exercise. Find something you enjoy and do it!

- Get off the bus one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Join an “Aquasize” class – it’s social and fun
- Stand up while talking on the phone.
- Stretch to reach items in high places and squat or bend to look at items at floor level.
- Take dance lessons (you can move AND listen to music you enjoy).
- Enjoy nature while walking – and perhaps a friend or their dog will join you.
- Join a recreational club that emphasizes physical activity.
- Participate in charity walks and raise money for good causes while you exercise.

Making a commitment to exercise with another person can help with your motivation and enjoyment.

You can ask family or friends to give you memberships or passes to exercise activities as holiday or birthday gifts.

**You might like to write down a few forms of exercises that you would find enjoyable and the names of people you would like to ask to exercise with you—your exercise buddies.**

| Exercise I Enjoy | Possible Exercise Buddy |
|------------------|-------------------------|
|                  |                         |
|                  |                         |
|                  |                         |

## HYDRATION\*

The brain relies on an adequate amount of water in your body (hydration) to function properly. If you are already having problems with brain function, keeping your brain properly hydrated is even more important.

You should drink at least six cups of fluid per day, and it is best if that fluid is water. There are some drinking bottles that can help you to measure your intake. They are often given out free at events—perhaps you can pick up a drinking bottle for yourself.

An illness that causes dementia can reduce one's sense of thirst—so try to drink the six cups of fluid even if you do not feel thirsty.

## ALCOHOL

Health care professionals strongly recommend that alcohol consumption either be eliminated or significantly restricted if you have an illness causing dementia.

Consuming alcohol in combination with prescribed medications may be a bad idea. Talk this matter over with your physician or pharmacist.

## MENTAL EXERCISE

- Be mentally active! Make it your business to find things that challenge your memory and thought processes—this will help strengthen the connections between your brain cells.
- There are always new experiences to try, so be proactive and find something you enjoy.
- There are a number of puzzles you can access for free—either in the free newspapers that come to our homes or on the internet.
- Ask your family and friends to get you the kind of puzzles you enjoy as holiday or birthday gifts.
- Read the paper.

\* Adapted from *The Merck Manual of Health and Aging*, edited by Mark H. Beers. Copyright 2004 by Merck & Co., Inc., Whitehouse Station, NJ. Please visit all of *The Merck Manuals* free online at [www.MerckManual.com](http://www.MerckManual.com).

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT:**

A lot of stress is not good for the brain.

If you are having challenges with your memory and ability to organize things, it is important that you balance this with time spent relaxing and reducing stress.

You might like to ask a friend or family member to help you develop and master stress management skills (listed on pages 38-41).

There are some excellent tapes and CDs that you could listen to. Many pharmacists and health stores sell relaxation tapes. You should be able to find one that appeals to you.

## *BREATHING*

### **1. Natural Breathing**

Ideally, adopt this breathing technique as your normal daily breathing pattern, whenever you are not physically active.

- Gently and slowly inhale, filling only your lower lungs (keep your upper chest still as your stomach moves in and out).
- Exhale slowly.
- Continue this slow, gentle breathing with a relaxed attitude, concentrating on filling only the lower lungs.

If you are having trouble with this, try placing the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth, behind your front teeth. For most people, this kicks in a reflex that helps them breathe with their bellies.

**I AM GOING TO USE THIS:**

**YES / NO**



## MUSCLE RELAXATION

### 1. *The Ten-Second Grip*

Use this technique anytime you want to release muscle tension and quiet your mind.

- Cross your arms in front of you, or grab and squeeze the arm rests of your chair, tensing your upper and lower arms. Tense your stomach and leg muscles as well. Hold that position (10 seconds) while you continue to breathe.
- Let go and take a Calming Breath.
- Repeat the above two actions twice more.
- Shift around in your seat shaking your arms, shoulders, and legs loose. Gently roll your head a few times.
- Close your eyes and breathe gently (30 seconds). Let your body feel warm, relaxed, and heavy during this time.

**I AM GOING TO USE THIS:**

**YES / NO**

### 2. *Brief Muscle Relaxation*

Use this technique anytime you want to release muscle tension and quiet your mind.

1. Close your eyes and sit quietly, letting go of any distracting thoughts (20 seconds).
2. Bend your arms and then cross them in front of your chest. Tighten your fists, arms, shoulders, chest and back, and lift your shoulders up to your ears, while you're breathing (5-10 seconds). Now relax (15-20 seconds).
3. Crunch your face up, wrinkle your nose, squint your eyes, purse your lips and bite down on your teeth (5-10 seconds). Now relax (15-20 seconds).
4. Take a deep breath, pull in your stomach and tense your lower back. Hold your breath while counting to six. Then exhale slowly. Now relax (15-20 seconds).
5. Extend your legs and tense them, while pointing your toes toward your head (5-10 seconds). Now relax (15-20 seconds).
6. Repeat Steps 2 to 5.
7. Sit quietly—clearing your mind and focusing on your breathing or on a pleasant scene in your mind—as you invite your body to feel relaxed, warm, and heavy (1 minute).
8. Open your eyes, feeling refreshed and at ease.

**I AM GOING TO USE THIS: YES / NO**

## THOUGHT STOPPING

### 1. Stop Your Negative Thoughts

Use this technique to interrupt recurring negative thoughts and worries.

- Listen for your worried, self-critical, or hopeless thoughts.
- Decide that you want to stop them (“Is this a helpful thought?”).
- Reinforce your decision through supportive comments (“I can let go of these thoughts.”).  
“Stop”!
- Mentally yell “Ow!” or snap a rubber band on your wrist.
- Begin Calming Counts.
- Think about something positive; it can be anything that makes you happy or relaxed.
- When the negative thoughts come back (as they will when you are just starting to use this technique) repeat these steps again. The more often you stop yourself from thinking these thoughts, the longer they will stay away.

**I AM GOING TO USE THIS:**

**YES / NO**

## DEPRESSION

Having a bad day, feeling blue or down, sadness and grief are part of our life experience. They occur because of natural changes in biological cycles and as emotional responses to difficult life experiences.

Coping with these feelings is best handled by acknowledging them, talking about them with friends and family, and keeping them in perspective.

However, there can be a gradual transition from these ups and downs to clinical depression—which is actually an illness of the brain. This illness becomes more common as we age.

The following is a checklist of some signs of clinical depression. **Please note, this is NOT a diagnostic tool**

- difficulty concentrating
- no longer experiencing pleasure in things formerly enjoyed
- sleep disturbances
- changes in eating habits—usually a decrease in appetite and food losing its taste, or in some cases, overeating
- feelings of guilt, helplessness and/or hopelessness
- increase in self-critical thoughts
- thoughts of suicide
- increased isolation from friends
- increased alcohol/drug use

If you experience most of the above symptoms for more than two weeks, there is a possibility that you may be suffering from clinical depression. If you think you may have clinical depression, speak to your physician. Untreated, it usually continues to get worse before it gets better. For some people it will not get better until they seek out treatment.

It is possible to have both clinical depression and dementia at the same time. Do not assume that the symptoms of clinical depression are a part of the dementia and therefore have to be tolerated. Clinical depression is treatable with medication and counseling.

## WORKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR\*

Your doctor can be one of the most important sources of support throughout your journey with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. There are a few points to keep in mind to make this relationship more successful:

### Preparing for your visit

- Book your appointment at a time of day when you are usually at your best. Make sure the person in the doctor's office who makes the appointments is aware of why you need an appointment at a specific time of day.
- Keep a list of things that happen day to day that concern you. Note your responses to any medications that you can discuss with your doctor at your next appointment.
- The typical doctor's office schedules 10 minutes per appointment. If you think you need more time with the doctor because you have a long list of questions and concerns, let the office staff know when you are scheduling your appointment. They may be able to give you a longer appointment or second one.
- Write down your questions and concerns before your appointment because it is hard to remember them when you are feeling stressed. This is especially true for people with memory loss. List your concerns in order of importance—this ensures that important issues are addressed first.
- It can be a good idea to take a support person with you. You will feel more confident knowing someone is there to support you and provide assistance when needed.
  - A support person can be there to:
    - » be a second set of ears
    - » keep notes if you find writing difficult
    - » be a back-up to your memory if you forget something
    - » help your doctor understand what you are trying to say
    - » provide details of the changes they may have noticed in you
    - » make sure that all issues and questions are dealt with before you leave the office

*\*adapted from the Alzheimer Society of Canada booklet and video "Working Together", developed with an unrestricted educational grant from Pfizer.*

- Talk to your support person ahead of the scheduled visit about what your expectations are during the appointment. Review the issues you wish to raise with the doctor so you can both be prepared.

### **Important information to take to your appointment:**

- On your first visit to a doctor, you might want to bring all of your medications with you. For subsequent visits, let the doctor know about any new medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications and any supplements.
- Bring notes about your symptoms: Have they changed? Are they the same? Are there any new ones?—include when they started, what is happening, and how they affect the way you function.
- Bring a list of past and current medical problems as well as results of any lab tests and scans you may have had.
- It is common for people living with Alzheimer’s disease or a related dementia to experience feelings that are difficult to handle. If these feelings intrude too much in your daily life, note them down and be sure to let your doctor know. Write down what you feel and when the feelings arise.

### **At the doctor’s office:**

- It is a good idea to keep a note of what your doctor says so that you can review it at home, or share it with family members.
- Writing the answers on the same sheet that you wrote down the questions you prepared can help you to keep track. It can also ensure that the information is easy to find. Before you leave, review with the doctor the information you have recorded.
- If you find it difficult to listen and write at the same time, ask your support person to record or write down the information.
- As an alternative, you can use a hand-held tape recorder to record the conversation with your doctor (provided the doctor agrees to being taped) or to record the information as soon as you leave the office.

**Communicating with your doctor:**

- You may have definite ideas of what a doctor should do for you.
- It is reasonable for you to expect that your doctor is:
  - » a good listener
  - » honest
  - » explains things to you in a way that you can understand
  - » directs you to support services
- Your doctor will also have expectations of you. These might include that you will:
  - » be honest—share all information related to an issue including your reactions and how it affects your day-to-day life
  - » be cooperative with your treatment plan or tell him/her if you deviate—for example, reporting that you have stopped taking a prescribed medication
  - » ask questions if you do not understand something

**Other Helpful Health Care Professionals:**

- Remember that there are other community resources. Using the same pharmacist to dispense all of your medications can be an extremely helpful safety measure. You can talk to your pharmacist about side effects of medication and interactions between medications—both prescription and over-the-counter. The pharmacist may also recommend a daily or weekly pill container that will help you take your medications as prescribed.

**Getting on-going support :**

- Let your doctor know when you are happy with the treatment and care you are receiving. Positive feedback is always helpful.
- You may think that your doctor is not listening to your concerns. As a first step, you should try to talk to him or her about it honestly and diplomatically. Often, an open conversation will resolve the issue.
- If you disagree with a suggested course of treatment and wish to get a second opinion, politely ask for a referral to another doctor or specialist.

**Things to note down for discussion about your relationship with your doctor:**

» What is your specific concern?

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» What are the positive aspects of the relationship?

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» What in the relationship is not working?

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» What can change to make it work?

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If the relationship does not improve, you might consider changing doctors to get the ongoing care and support you need and deserve.