

## Fact Sheet: On your way to brain health

There are practical, achievable things you can do now which play an important role in decreasing the risk of developing Alzheimer's and in slowing the disease progression. Researchers are finding more and more that lifestyle choices such as exercise and social and mental stimulation are good for you, and good for your brain.

### Move and be happy

Research continues to show that physical activity helps promote the health of your brain and your body. When blood circulates to the brain, it nourishes the cells with nutrients and oxygen, and it encourages the development of new cells and new connections. This is called "plasticity," and it's a process the brain is capable of doing at any age!

Exercise makes you feel good and promotes a more relaxed state of mind. For people with dementia, it can lead to a significant reduction in depression, an increased sense of independence and an improvement in quality of life.

Adults aged 65 and older should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-high-levels of intense aerobic physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

- Moderate-intensity aerobic activity makes you breathe harder and your heart beat faster. You may sweat a little, and you should be able to talk... but not sing.
- Every minute counts! If you're not active now, adding any amount of physical activity will bring some health benefits.
- Always check with your doctor before becoming much more physically active.

"Being physically active is associated with a 38% reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's disease."

Ontario Brain Institute

### Strength in numbers

Socializing relieves stress, so visiting friends, attending parties, and going to church is actually good for you.

Social support networks provide many other health benefits. For example, friends and family members support healthy behaviours such as eating properly or taking medications when prescribed. They provide you with a sense of belonging, and knowing you're not alone can go a long way in helping you manage worries. Interacting with other people also encourages thinking, feeling, analyzing, reasoning and intuition. These activities help develop connections between brain cells; with more connections between brain cells, cognitive function can be maintained longer.

Unfortunately, people with dementia often feel isolated because of the stigma associated with the disease. According to Alzheimer's Disease International:

- 40% reported they had been avoided or treated differently after diagnosis.
- 1 in 4 reported stigma as a reason for concealing their diagnosis.

Consider volunteering!  
It's a worthwhile activity that helps reduce social isolation, helps maintain skill sets, and encourages new friendships.

### **Challenge yourself**

“Exercising” your brain by reading, writing, figuring out crossword puzzles, and challenging yourself with other intellectual tasks throughout your lifetime is important to maintaining brain health in older age.

Research is showing that mental stimulation helps increase the brain’s networks of connections and maintains brain health throughout life. A brain-healthy lifestyle also emphasizes the importance of overcoming routine and monotony in our daily lives. By approaching daily routines in new ways, you engage new or little used mental pathways.

Challenging your brain doesn't have to be difficult. It can be as simple as dialing the phone with your less dominant hand or as complex as learning a new language. Remember, the goal is to give your brain a new experience and a workout each and every day.

Did you know...

"For each additional year of work, the risk of getting dementia is reduced by 3.2%."

INSERM

French government's health research agency.