Engage, Enable, Empower
Making the most of life with dementia
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Introduction

This booklet is for people who are living with dementia. Dementia can be difficult to live with at times. Fortunately, there are lots of ways to have a good quality of life with dementia.

Keeping the mind and body active is essential. People who remain engaged with their day-to-day activities, interests and social groups often feel more satisfied and fulfilled. They continue to enjoy life and have fun.

Research has confirmed that keeping active and eating well can help and may even slow down changes in the brain.

The purpose of this booklet is to share advice for living a good quality of life with dementia. The advice is based on the latest research. It is also supported by many people living with dementia who have shared their stories.

You’ll be surprised at how small changes to your lifestyle can lead to better health and wellbeing. Read on to learn more.
Key Messages

Engage
Researchers and people with dementia both agree that it is important to stay engaged after a diagnosis of dementia.

Enable
Support from others may enable you to keep doing the things that are important to you.

Empower
Taking steps to stay engaged and look after your health can be very empowering.

This booklet will look at four main ways to Engage, Enable and Empower:

- **Mind** – keep your mind active
- **Body** – keep your body active
- **Support** – get appropriate support
- **Health** – look after your health
Keeping your mind active is important.

You can exercise your mind by doing things that are a bit challenging. It is helpful to keep learning, thinking and doing a variety of activities. Keeping your mind active can help you feel good and think more clearly.

Some examples include:

- Reading
- Singing
- Playing games
- Talking with others
- Doing crossword puzzles
- Learning a new skill
Trish’s Story:

Trish is a retired teacher who is living with younger onset dementia. She lives with her supportive husband and enjoys visiting her adult children and grandchildren. Trish also enjoys a range of activities that keep her mind active and engaged. She particularly loves reading, cooking, knitting and doing puzzles. Some aspects of these activities have become more difficult over time. Trish and her family have developed many strategies that enable Trish to continue enjoying her interests on a daily basis. She also continues to try new things and meet new people, which brings her great joy.
Activities can usually be changed to suit an individual’s strengths and abilities. It sometimes takes creativity. For Trish, there are many ways she can continue with her interests and keep her mind active:

- Playing games with her grandchildren
- Listening to books on tape
- Cooking a familiar meal using a recipe book
- Knitting scarves for charity
- Doing crossword puzzles in a large-print book
- Doing colourful jigsaw puzzles with fewer pieces
Physical activity is essential to keeping fit. It can also improve the way you think and feel.

National Physical Activity Guidelines* recommend that people do at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. If this is difficult, start with less activity and increase it over time. Ideally people of all ages and abilities will do a few activities every day that improve fitness, strength, flexibility and balance.

Some examples include:

- Walking
- Dancing
- Tai Chi
- Gardening
- Lawn bowls
- Exercise classes
Jim’s Story:

Jim is a 76 year old man who has enjoyed golfing for many years. Recently he mentioned to his daughter that he can no longer play golf because he has dementia.

He was having trouble keeping score and walking the full distance of the course. They talked about it and decided that it would still be possible if they hired a golf buggy and his golf partner kept score.

The family also made plans to play mini putt. Jim enjoyed teaching his grandkids how to hold the golf clubs. Jim and his family were happy to see that he could still enjoy golf in a different way.
For Jim, there are many ways he can continue with his favourite activity:

- Golfing 9 holes instead of 18
- Using an electric golf buggy
- Going to the driving range
- Playing mini putt with the family
- Volunteering at a golf fundraiser
- Playing a golf video game
- Watching golf on TV
- Talking about golf with others
- Looking at golf magazines
Getting support from family, friends and services in the community can help you to keep doing the things that you want or need to be able to do.

Often people around you would like to help, but may not know what to do. Let people know how they can help.

If you can get some support, you’ll have more energy to do the things that you enjoy most. You may be able to get some help with tasks around the house like cooking, cleaning or showering. There are also services that can help with issues such as transportation or shopping.

For more information or support:

✅ Call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500 or visit fightdementia.org.au/national/helpline

✅ Call MyAgedCare on 1800 200 422 or visit www.myagedcare.gov.au

✅ Speak to family, friends or other supportive people in your life
Rose’s Story:

Rose is an 86 year old woman with Alzheimer’s disease (a common type of dementia). She had been a swimming coach for many years when her children were in school. She still enjoys swimming at the local pool as much as possible.

When she moved to an aged care residence recently, she let the staff know that swimming was important to her. They were able to organise regular group outings to the pool for swimming and water aerobics.

Rose enjoyed helping to teach others, in the group, who were not as confident in the water. She said to the staff that she felt valued again.
Practical support and social support can help you continue living a healthy, active lifestyle. Rose was supported in a number of ways to continue going the pool:

- Staff organised the outings and transportation
- Family members ensured that Rose had suitable swimwear
- Residents offered encouragement and support to one another to go to the pool each week
- Doctors reviewed treatment and medication to manage health conditions
Eating well and staying hydrated improves your overall health and energy levels so you can remain active. It also helps you to think better.

We need a variety of nutritious foods:

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Whole grains
- Lean protein (eg. fish, beans, chicken)
- Low fat dairy

We should also limit some foods:

- Sugary foods and drinks
- High fat foods
- Salty foods
- Alcohol
Athena’s Story:

Athena is an 82 year old woman living with dementia. Her husband passed away last year. Recently, Athena noticed she was feeling faint at times. Her clothing felt loose, so she must have lost some weight. When she thought about her eating and drinking, she realised she was often not having anything between breakfast and dinner.

Living on her own, she was not cooking as often. Athena decided to organise regular meals with her sons and a social group at her church. She also ensured she was drinking enough water throughout the day. She soon felt better and now has more energy to do the things she enjoys, like gardening and volunteering at the church.
Good nutrition is important for health and quality of life. There are a number of things you can do to ensure you are having enough healthy foods and drinks every day:

- Monitor your weight
- Speak to your doctor or dietician about your diet
- Set up reminders at meal times (e.g. phone call or alarm clock)
- Arrange for meals to be delivered
- Buy a range of healthy snacks and frozen meals that don’t require a lot of preparation or cooking
- Keep a glass of water with you
Looking after your health can help you to keep active and feel well.

**TIP:** Continue to take care of any health conditions you may have.

- Treating health problems such as depression, high blood pressure and diabetes can ease some symptoms of dementia. It can also help you to do the things that are important to you.

**TIP:** Keep your doctor and carers informed about any problems you are having. Take note of changes in your health or ask a carer to do so.

- There are often many ways to manage health problems. You can talk these over to find the options that suit you best.
Ahmed’s Story:

Ahmed is a 76 year old man. For the past 10 years he has started his day by taking his dog for a walk at 7am. But lately he has been staying in bed until 10am. He finds it hard to get moving in the morning. He has some pain from arthritis. He has lost his appetite and is not managing his diabetes as well as he used to.

He said to the doctor, “I’m an old man now and my dementia is getting worse, so it doesn’t matter.” The doctor explained that it can still make a difference. By treating his diabetes and pain he is likely to feel better in many ways.

He agreed to try this. He was surprised that he was able to get out for his morning walks again using his wheelchair. His dog Max was very pleased!
It is common for people to be managing a number of health conditions. This can be complicated, but good management of health issues is important. Some people find the following strategies helpful:

- Invite a support person to attend medical appointments with you
- Keep a list of health conditions, allergies and medications with you at all times
- Establish a routine and set cues to help you remember when to take medication or other treatment
- Ask your pharmacist to organise your medicine into a weekly pill box and remind you when you will need a refill of your prescriptions
Summary of Engage, Enable, Empower

Mind – keep your mind active

Body – keep your body active

Support – get appropriate support

Health – look after your health

For further information:
Engage, Enable, Empower: www.livingwellwithdementia.org.au
Alzheimer’s Australia: fightdementia.org.au
National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500
Eat for Health Australian Dietary Guidelines: www.eatforhealth.gov.au
National Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Australians: www.healthyactive.gov.au
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