

18 September 2013

## Media Release

### Let's get physical to reduce the risk of dementia

People who do regular physical activity have healthier brains, better memory, planning and other thinking skills, and have less chance of developing dementia, according to a new paper released today by Alzheimer's Australia in partnership with Fitness Australia.

The paper, *'Physical Activity for Brain Health and Fighting Dementia'*, has been developed through combining the latest research both locally and internationally. Its launch coincides with Dementia Awareness Week and the paper outlines how physical activity improves brain health and may increase the volume of the hippocampus in the brain, which is essential in helping to coordinate memory.

"Research has found that about half of Alzheimer's disease cases are potentially attributable to risk factors you can change," said Dr Maree Farrow, Research Fellow at Alzheimer's Australia Vic who co-authored the paper with Dr Kathryn Ellis, Senior Research Fellow at The University of Melbourne.

"The benefits of physical activity for the health of your body and your heart are well known. Physical activity also has a significant positive impact on your brain health."

A study by US researchers found that around 13% (over 4 million) of Alzheimer's disease cases worldwide are attributable to physical inactivity. The researchers found that if a quarter of inactive people became more active, this could prevent nearly 1 million cases of Alzheimer's disease worldwide. An Australian study showed that if 5% of inactive people became active every 5 years, this would reduce Australian dementia prevalence by 11% by 2051. That equates to around 100,000 fewer Australians living with dementia, simply by getting more Australians to do regular physical activity.

"The brain grows new cells and connections between them throughout life, helping us continue to learn. And the brain requires adequate blood flow to receive the oxygen and nutrients it needs to function well. Physical activity supports these important aspects of brain biology. Whilst it is normal for the brain to shrink a little as we grow older, this age-related shrinkage is reduced in people who engage in regular physical activity.

"Whatever your stage of life, being fit and healthy matters," Dr Farrow said.

It is estimated that over 320,000 Australians are living with dementia in 2013. Without a significant medical breakthrough, that is expected to increase to around 900,000 by 2050.

Alzheimer's Australia's Your Brain Matters program provides evidence-based advice that healthy and active lifestyles are associated with better brain function and lower dementia risk. For the complete evidence paper *Physical Activity for Brain Health and Fighting Dementia* visit [yourbrainmatters.org.au](http://yourbrainmatters.org.au)

"We can't yet cure dementia but we can reduce our risk by simply becoming more physically active, this can be as easy as going for a regular walk or participating in a structured activity," said Lauretta Stace, CEO at Fitness Australia.

"That is why Fitness Australia is working to build better linkages between registered exercise professionals and health professionals, so that they are confident in directing their patients to structured physical activity that can meet their patients' needs. The fitness industry must be a central part of the preventive health agenda and that's why we are engaging with organisations such as Alzheimer's Australia."

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To find a Fitness Australia registered service provider, go to [www.startexercising.com.au](http://www.startexercising.com.au)

Dementia Awareness Week is being held nationally between 16 – 22 September. World Alzheimer's Day is on Saturday 21 September. The theme is 'Brain Health - Making the Connections' and aims to educate the general community about the benefits of brain health and how to go about leading a brain healthy lifestyle. More than 20 events and activities are being held across the state, many of which in regional Victoria, providing the community with up-to-date research and services news.

Dementia Awareness Week 2013 is supported by financial assistance from the Australian Government.

*Alzheimer's Australia is the charity for people with dementia and their families and carers. As the peak body, it provides advocacy, support services, education and information. More than 320,000 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach more than half a million by 2030.*

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

**An interpreter service is available**

(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)

[www.fightdementia.org.au](http://www.fightdementia.org.au)

[Your Brain Matters](http://www.yourbrainmatters.org.au)

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