

Engage, enable, empower

Making the most of life with dementia



Dementia Australia is the source of trusted information, education and services for the estimated half a million Australians living with dementia, and the almost 1.6 million people involved in their care. We advocate for positive change and support vital research. We are here to support people impacted by dementia, and to enable them to live as well as possible.

No matter how you are impacted by dementia or who you are, we are here for you.

For further information and enquiries please contact:

National Dementia Helpline
1800 100 500

Find us online
[dementia.org.au](https://www.dementia.org.au)

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Introduction

If you're living with dementia, this booklet is for you. Dementia has its good and bad days, and we understand that dementia can be difficult to live with at times. Fortunately, there are lots of small changes you can make to live well with dementia.

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

By keeping your mind and body active, and remaining engaged in day-to-day activities, interests and social groups, you can live life to the fullest.

This booklet aims to share advice for living a good quality of life with dementia. The advice is based on research and is 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.

Make the most of life with the three Es

Engage

Researchers and people with dementia agree that it's important you stay **engaged** after being diagnosed with dementia.

Enable

Support from others may **enable** you to keep doing the things that matter to you.

Empower

Taking steps to stay engaged and look after your health can feel **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 the right support

Health – look after your health





Mind

Keeping your mind active is important

Keeping your mind active can help you feel good and think more clearly. You can exercise your mind by doing things that are a bit challenging, learning new things, or doing a variety of activities.

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 with younger onset dementia. She lives with her supportive husband and loves visiting her adult children and grandchildren. Trish also enjoys a range of activities that keep her mind active and engaged, including:

- reading
- cooking
- knitting
- doing puzzles.

She also gets a lot of joy out of continuing to try new things and meet new people. Some aspects of these activities have become more difficult over time, but Trish and her family have strategies that enable Trish to continue enjoying her interests every day.

Discover more personal stories about people living well with dementia online at

livingwellwithdementia.org.au/category/personal-stories

You can change activities to suit the person with dementia's individual strengths and abilities. Sometimes, you may just need a pinch of 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.



Body

Physical activity is essential to keeping fit. It can also improve the way you think and feel.

Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines recommend that people over 65 do at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. If this is difficult, start with less activity and increase slowly over time. No matter your age or abilities, it's ideal to do a few activities every day that improve fitness, strength, flexibility and balance. Be sure to consult your doctor on safe exercises for you.

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, Jim had trouble keeping score and walking the full distance of the course. Jim mentioned to his daughter that he can no longer play golf because he has dementia.

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 golf. 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 nine holes instead of 18.
- Using an electric golf buggy.
- Going to the driving range.
- Playing mini golf 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.



Support

Getting services in the community can help you to keep doing the things that you want or need to do.

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

Asking for support may be difficult at first, but it can make all the difference. With 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 dementia.org.au/support/programs.
- If you are living with dementia and are under 65 years old, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a national scheme that provides funding to access supports and services. People living with younger onset dementia may be eligible to receive this funding, visit www.ndis.gov.au.
- Call MyAgedCare on **1800 200 422** or visit 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 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 to 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.



Health

Eating well and staying hydrated improves your overall health and energy levels so you can remain active. It also helps you to think better.

You should try to eat a variety of nutritious foods, including:

- vegetables
- fruit
- whole grains
- lean protein (e.g. fish, beans, chicken)
- low fat dairy.

It's also important to limit some foods, including:

- sugary foods and drinks
- high fat foods
- salty foods
- alcohol.



Athena's story:

Athena is an 82-year-old woman living with dementia. After her husband passed away, 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 your health and quality of life. Here are some things you can do to ensure you are having enough healthy foods and drinks every day:

- Arrange for meals to be delivered.
- Get a friend, family member or carer to help you plan and set out your weekly meals at home (e.g. on a whiteboard).
- Speak to your doctor or dietician about your diet.
- Set up reminders at meal times (e.g. phone call or alarm clock).
- Buy a range of healthy snacks and pre-prepared meals that don't require a lot of preparation or cooking.
- Monitor your weight and how your clothes fit you.
- Keep a bottle of water with you. You may set goals to drink the whole bottle by a certain time in the day.



Ahmed's story:

Ahmed is a 76-year-old man. For the past 10 years he's started his day by taking his dog for a walk at 7am. But lately he's been staying in bed until 10am. He finds it hard to get moving in the morning. He has some pain from arthritis, he's 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!

If you're managing a number of health conditions, it's important to know you're not alone. We understand it can be complicated. However, good management of any health issues you have is vital. You might find these 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.

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 you enjoy.

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.

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- Dr. Tanya Petrovich – Manager, Business Development, Alzheimer's Australia Vic
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About Dementia Australia

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We advocate for positive change and support vital research. We are here to support people impacted by dementia, and to enable them to live as well as possible.

No matter how you are impacted by dementia, we are here for you.

Founded by carers more than 35 years ago, today we are the national peak body for people living with dementia, their families and carers.

We involve people impacted by dementia and their experiences in our activities and decision-making, to make sure we are representative of the diverse range of dementia experiences. We amplify the voices of people impacted by dementia through advocating and sharing stories to help inform and inspire others.

For further information:

Call the National **Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500**

- dementia.org.au
- livingwellwithdementia.org.au
- eatforhealth.gov.au
- [**National Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Australians**](#)

National Dementia Helpline

1800 100 500



For language assistance

call **131 450**

Find us online

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