

About you: Health, wellbeing and lifestyle

This help sheet discusses health and lifestyle choices for people living with dementia.

Being tired, stressed or physically ill can affect how anyone thinks or acts. This is particularly the case when you are living with dementia, because dementia may be impacting your ability to think.

Making adjustments to your lifestyle can be helpful in managing your health challenges.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle

Managing tiredness

Being tired affects your ability to focus on tasks and maintain your attention. In turn, this has an impact on your memory and behaviour.

Tiredness can also have an impact on finishing tasks by reducing your reaction time, attention and coordination.

Sometimes, the impact of tiredness could be dangerous, such as when you are driving or operating machinery.

Tips to manage tiredness:

- Establish a simpler daily routine, which may help to eliminate or reduce stress or tiredness.
- Get adequate sleep. Ensure you get the amount of sleep you need to feel at your best.
- Take regular breaks throughout the day.
- Try to complete important tasks when you are generally most alert. This is often in the morning.

Maintaining nutrition and hydration

A poor diet can affect your energy levels, physical health, attention and memory.

Dementia can also affect your sensation of hunger or thirst.

Tips to maintain nutrition and hydration:

- It is important to have a balanced diet and include a variety of fruit and vegetables.
- Try to eat at set times and regular intervals each day.
- Talk to your doctor or a dietician for dietary advice. Ask to check your vitamin and mineral levels regularly, because certain deficiencies can affect brain functions.
- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. Dehydration can cause tiredness and affect your ability to perform at your usual capacity or level. Dehydration can also lead to delirium, where you may experience restlessness, excitement, delusions or hallucinations.

Monitoring alcohol intake

- Alcohol, even in moderate quantities, can affect your mental ability. Limiting alcohol consumption and avoiding excess consumption is important. Family, friends and colleagues can support you with this.
- Alcohol can lower mood. It is best avoided if you are already experiencing depression.
- Alcohol can interact with many medications. Seek medical advice or talk to a pharmacist about the effects of mixing alcohol with medications.

Managing stress

Stress is common. It can impact both your thinking and behaviour.

Tips to minimise or manage stress:

- Establish a daily routine and keep changes to a minimum.
- Keep tasks at a level where you have a sense of control and achievement.

- Consider using relaxation techniques such as listening to peaceful music or meditating.
- Seek reassurance in stressful situations.
- Speak to a doctor, psychologist, counsellor or another health professional to learn ways to manage stress.

Participating in physical activity

Physical activity can help maintain alertness, concentration, attention and memory. It may also reduce stress and anxiety, and improve your mood.

If possible, maintain moderate levels of physical activity.

- Regular physical activity stimulates brain functioning and may help improve or maintain your brain abilities.
- Physical activity may help reduce your risk of developing depression or other health problems.
- If you are part of a sporting club or team, try to continue with that. Consider informing the organisation or other players about your diagnosis. Ask for help to adjust to your changing needs (such as a teammate keeping your score).
- Try to be involved in the daily household routine, such as housework and gardening.

Exercising your brain

Keeping your brain active has been shown to help slow changes to memory and thinking in some people. Learning a new skill or taking up a new hobby is the key here, rather than doing more of something you have grown accustomed to. Crosswords and Sudoku are good examples.

Keeping your brain active may also assist with your mood and help you feel better about yourself.

Maintaining your health

Having regular check-ups with health professionals is important to help you stay healthy. Your medical team is there to support you, from diagnosis through to ongoing management and care.

Tips to help you stay healthy:

- Book regular appointments with your doctor for general check-ups.

- Seek medical support if you become unwell or experience any pain.
- Arrange regular dental check-ups to maintain oral health.
- Have medications reviewed by your doctor or pharmacist, to help you understand the medicines you are taking, and the right times and dosages to take.

Keeping socially engaged

Being socially engaged and remaining active in the community may increase your wellbeing, just as they do for everyone.

- Try to maintain your social contacts and usual engagements. Social activities and interacting with others can reduce feelings of loneliness or depression.
- Consider joining a support group. For example, a walking group, a Men's Shed, or a support group for people living with dementia.
- You may wish to join a group or activity alone, or with your family or partner.

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia library service
Visit: dementia.org.au/library
- Dementia Australia support
Visit: dementia.org.au/support
- Dementia Australia education
Visit: dementia.org.au/education

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au