

Healthy Living with Alzheimer's Disease

A combination of social, mental, and physical stimulation lays the foundation for a healthy life. Even after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, stimulating activities should be continued and modified as needed. Regular exercise and a nutritious diet are also important for people living with Alzheimer's. Here are a few ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle, which can help people cope better with the impact of this disease.

Keep an Active Mind

Staying mentally active may be associated with preservation of cognitive function. Children and young adults build up brain "reserves" by reading and undertaking mental challenges, and older adults can continue to create these brain connections through stimulating activities. In fact, building a cognitive reserve is a lifelong process in which some nerve cells (neurons) form, some die, and others interconnect. The following activities all help form these vital neural connections, which may buffer people from cognitive decline:

- Reading progressively more challenging books
- Learning a musical instrument
- Studying a new language
- Creating art
- Playing chess
- Engaging in other mental activities

While there are many activities that can stimulate the mind, the pursuit of tried-and-true favorite pastimes such as board and card games, crossword

puzzles, Sudoku, brain teasers, and word games is also valuable. Most of these have the added benefit of maintaining and increasing social contact with friends and family.

Other examples of beneficial activities include:

- Reading magazines and newspapers
- Writing and corresponding through mail and email
- Conversing and singing
- Visiting museums
- Attending plays
- Finding creative new ways to carry out routines
- Playing video games and using the computer to entertain and energize the brain

Get Regular Exercise

Lifelong exercise reduces a person's chances of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, and cardiovascular disease, all of which may be associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease. The brain also benefits greatly from the increased blood circulation brought about and sustained by regular physical activity.

Exercise improves overall physical and mental fitness, and emotional health as well. Exercise is excellent for:

- Releasing stress
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Increasing flexibility

A combination of aerobic exercise, strength training, and activity to increase flexibility is recommended. The ability of the individual with Alzheimer's to enjoy recreational activities will depend in part on the stage of the disease. Many activities can still be continued, with some accommodations. Some suggested forms of exercise for those living with Alzheimer's include:

- Walks with a companion
- Aerobic exercise classes at a senior center or local swimming pool
- Light gardening
- Modified sports games with others

As the disease progresses, it is still worthwhile to have outlets for physical activity to maintain muscle tone and physical strength and elevate mood. Sessions with a physical therapist might be beneficial.

Be sure to discuss any exercise plans with your health care provider so that an appropriate exercise program can be tailored to your specific needs.

Eat a Varied Diet

Eating a diet rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and low in sugar and fat can reduce the incidence of many chronic diseases. Researchers are continuing to study whether these dietary modifications are also applicable to Alzheimer's disease.

Your diet should:

- Be low in saturated fat and added sugar
- Contain omega-3 fatty acids found in foods, including:
 - Oily fish like tuna and salmon

- Nuts and seeds
- Certain oils such as canola and olive
- Be high in antioxidants (including vitamins C and E, lutein, and zeaxanthin), which are found in foods such as:
 - Green leafy vegetables (e.g., spinach)
 - Cruciferous vegetables (e.g., broccoli and cauliflower)
 - Berries
 - Tomatoes
 - Red grapes
 - Carrots

For healthy recipes that include some of the foods listed above, visit brightfocus.org/recipes or call us at 1-855-345-6237.

About Alzheimer's Disease Research

Alzheimer's Disease Research, a BrightFocus Foundation program, supports groundbreaking research around the world exploring the root causes, prevention strategies, treatments, and ultimately a cure for Alzheimer's disease. For more information, please visit brightfocus.org/alzheimers.

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