



Brain health: How to reduce your dementia risk

The brain is a vital organ that plays a role in every thought and action you make. Because of its critical role, it's never too soon or too late in life to start taking care of your brain.

What is dementia?

Dementia is a term used to describe symptoms caused by neurological diseases or injuries that impact the function of the brain and make thinking more difficult over time.

Dementia develops when risk factors such as chronic disease, head trauma and age overwhelm the brain's ability to protect and repair itself.

Research suggests that leading a healthy lifestyle can improve brain health and reduce your risk of developing dementia.



Even small changes to how you live can help maintain and build new connections in the brain, so it's better able to fight off illness.

What are the risk factors?

While there are some risk factors you can't control, such as genetics and age, you can manage many risk factors for dementia, including:

- high blood pressure
- smoking
- diabetes
- obesity
- lack of physical activity
- poor diet
- high alcohol consumption
- depression
- traumatic brain injury
- not challenging your brain regularly
- hearing loss
- social isolation

One in 20 Canadians over age 65 has Alzheimer's disease, a form of dementia.

Alzheimer Society of Canada

TIP: What's good for your heart is good for your brain. Know your numbers:

- body weight
- blood pressure
- cholesterol
- blood sugar



Train your brain

Take steps to help slow changes in your memory, reduce your dementia risk.



Be physically active. Physical fitness helps brain fitness. Exercise 30-60 minutes 3 or 4 times a week with activity that increases your heart rate. Consult your doctor first. For tips, [click here](#) and [here](#).

Eat nutrient-rich foods. Eat a diet rich in plant-based foods, whole grains and healthy fats. For information on the Canada Food Guide, [click here](#).



Challenge your brain. This can include many activities, such as doing a crossword puzzle, Sudoku, reading, playing cards or another game, or working on a jigsaw puzzle. Click [here](#) for tips.

Get plenty of sleep. Rest so you are rejuvenated and can manage stress. Develop good sleep habits to get seven to eight consecutive hours of sleep per night. For more information, click [here](#).



Stay socially active. Connecting with other people can fight depression and stress, which can contribute to memory loss. For hints on how to stay socially connected to remain mentally connected, [click here](#).

Make safe choices. Wear a helmet during activities that may result in a head injury. Check for fall hazards. Avoid harmful habits, such as smoking and excessive drinking. For details, [click here](#).



Sources

[The Alzheimer Society of Canada](#)

[The Mayo Clinic](#)

Video Resource

[Click here](#) for a short animated video from Dr. Sabina Brennan of Trinity College Dublin on how to boost brain health to prevent dementia. (To read the French captions for this video, please click on the CC button in the bottom right corner and choose your language.)