



Exercising with dementia

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Exercise helps to reduce the risk of developing dementia. Improvement in your general health and wellbeing is important as it helps maintain your ability to perform and take pleasure in the activities of daily living.

Exercise significantly improves heart health and prevents against some cancers, obesity, stroke, hypertension and Type 2 diabetes. It also improves memory and sleep quality and may improve thinking abilities among older adults with or without dementia. Strength and balance exercises helps keep bones strong and prevents osteoporosis. Regular exercise offers opportunities for social interaction, reduces feelings of isolation, the risk and fear of falls and improves self-confidence.

Choose activities that you enjoy, or enjoyed in the past. Group exercise and walking clubs provide a social element to exercise. Make regular exercise a part of your routine—ask friends and family to join you!

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist and always follow your medical treatment plan.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150-300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75-150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve. You can get the recommended exercise by taking three 10-minute brisk walks throughout the day— take a friend or family member and safely ‘clock the block’ of your neighbourhood!
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
How long:	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, jogging, snowshoeing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Working out at the gym with treadmills, stationary bikes and rowing machines helps improve mental agility too. Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.
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What will it do for me?

Regular exercise improves heart health and mental agility and helps with cognitive ability.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week. Start with once a week and increase this when you are comfortable. Enlist the help of friends, family or volunteer groups to help you stick to a regular plan.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time. If fatigue is a problem, try exercising in the morning.
How long:	Choose 8–10 strength exercises for the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1 -3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Resistance machines may help provide back support to maintain balance in case of fatigue and to reduce falls. A supportive strength exercise plan could include pushing up to rise on the toes, modified squats, repetitively rising and sitting from a chair, wearing ankle and wrist weights around the house or out on a walk, and floor or wall push-ups. Many strength exercises can also be done seated or when lying flat.

What will it do for me?

Regular strength exercises significantly improve your cognitive abilities. Overall muscle strength helps reduce the risk of falls which in turn builds self-confidence to attend to the activities of daily living.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week.
How hard:	Choose 2–3 balance exercises and repeat 10–15 times each. Try 2 sets of each exercise..
How long:	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi, or simple home balance exercises such as heel raises or walking heel to toe in a line. Balance exercise can be done standing up, using a chair, against a wall or sitting down. Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe. Ensure the area is clutter free, or join a class. Avoid doing balance exercises alone.



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What will it do for me?

Practising balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries, which are common in people living with dementia and can lead to problems such as fractures and loss of independent mobility.

Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Exercise safety

Ask your doctor for more information about how to exercise safely and how to maintain an exercise plan. Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Exercise at your own pace and ability. Use a cane or mobility aid if needed, ask a friend, family or volunteer group to join you or try seated exercises.

Take extra care as a pedestrian or while walking/hiking. Wear an ID bracelet or smart watch, or carry a smartphone if you are alone.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Helpful resources

The Alzheimer's Society of Canada provides exercises and programs available in your region that can help you stay physically active. <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-living-dementia/living-well-dementia/staying-physically-active>

Scan for more physical activity resources!

