

Lifestyle Tips



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Physical activity: A boost to the brain



We often think of physical activity as the key to maintaining strong muscles and bones, but one organ that also benefits from moving our bodies is - the brain. The human brain plays a

vital role in every action we take, and as we age, we need to make sure that we are taking care of our whole bodies, including our grey matter.

One of the most feared degenerative brain diseases, Alzheimer's disease, is the leading cause of dementia in Canada. Alzheimer's causes thinking and memory to become seriously

impaired. With a growing aging population, today more than half a million Canadians have Alzheimer's, which is 1 in 11 Canadians over the age of 65 that are currently diagnosed with the disease¹. If nothing changes, the number of people living with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia is expected to more than



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double, reaching 1.1 million Canadians within 25 years¹.

By making healthy lifestyle choices now, we may be able to reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and improve the brain's ability to sustain long-term health. Evidence indicates that physical activity has the potential to reduce the risk of developing dementia and can also help mitigate the impact of the disease on the individual and their families¹. Physical activity interventions have been shown to improve mood, decrease stress, decrease cognitive decline, and improve social function^{1,2}.

Follow the tips below to include physical activity as a part of your daily routine to improve overall well-being and to beef up the health of your brain. And, if you have a pre-existing condition, always remember to check with your health-care professional to see what types of physical activity might be right for you.



1. Start slowly and think of it as activity rather than exercise. Start by adding a little bit of activity at a time into your daily routine. For example, start by parking farther from the doors in a parking lot or walking to the corner store rather than driving. Even increasing your daily activity slowly in 10 minute intervals will provide moderate benefits for your body.
2. Choose from organized activities, such as recreational sports, or non-organized activities, like going for a hike in the park, or riding your bike to work. Variety is important for keeping motivated and is also good for the brain.
3. Love the activity that you do! If you chose activities that you enjoy, you are more likely to stick with them.
4. Cardiovascular activities such as walking can help maintain general fitness, are cost-effective, and can be done almost anywhere. Plus, walking is recognized as one of the safest and most effective forms of cardiovascular physical activity for the mind and body.
5. Set reasonable goals for yourself. If you can only walk for 10 minutes a day, start there and slowly increase the duration and intensity of the activity. Setting achievable goals will help to improve your motivation and determination to stick to this path.
6. Schedule physical activity into your daily routine. Planning makes physical activity an important priority in your life.
7. Not only exercise more, but also sit less! Being sedentary is just as unhealthy for the body and mind as not being physical active. Small daily changes such as watching less Tv, walking to work, taking the stairs instead of the escalator, and walking over to talk to a colleague rather than calling or sending an email, can be very important in boosting brain health.
8. Include others in your journey. Physical activity with others can be more motivating and definitely more fun. Not only will you stay more motivated, you will also gain the brain healthy benefits of social interaction. Walk with a friend at lunch time or after work, take a class with your partner, or participate in sports with your kids on the weekend.
9. Caregivers can play a significant role. Think about what kind of physical activities you both enjoy, perhaps walking, swimming, tennis, dancing, or gardening. Determine the time of day and place where this type of activity would work best.

Reference List

- ¹ Alzheimer's Society of Canada. (2010). *Rising tide: The Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society*. ISBN978-0-9733522-2-1. Retrieved from http://www.alzheimer.ca/english/rising_tide/rising_tide_report.htm
- ² McCurry et al. (2010). Predictors of Short and Long-Term Adherence to a Daily Walking Program in Persons with Alzheimer's Disease. *Am J Alzheimers Dis Other Dement*, 25(6): 505-512. doi:10.1177/1533317510376173