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# Senior Health & Wellness

## What we know about exercise and dementia risk

Three seconds go by in a flash, but that's enough time for another person to join the masses already diagnosed with dementia. According to Alzheimer's Disease International, every three seconds someone in the world develops dementia. The World Health Organization notes that various diseases and injuries that affect the brain can contribute to dementia. As menacing a threat as dementia presents, individuals are not helpless against it. In fact, exercise, which can help lower risk for heart disease, stroke and various other conditions, can be a valuable ally against dementia as well.

### What is the link between exercise and dementia?

Dementia remains something of a mystery, but the Alzheimer's Society notes that evidence is now strong enough to support the assertion that lack of physical exercise increases a person's risk of developing dementia. The Alzheimer's Society also notes that researchers have discovered improvements in thinking and memory and reduced rates of dementia among middle-aged and older adults who exercised compared to those that did not.

### Is cardio the most effective exercise at lowering dementia risk?

Speaking with CNBC, Silky Singh Pahlajani, a clinical professor of behavioral neurology and neuropsychiatry at Weill Cornell Medicine, noted that cardiovascular exercise, often referred to as cardio, can provide the biggest benefit for brain health of any form of exercise. Cardiovascular exercise can increase heart rate, which helps deliver oxygen cells to the brain. The National



Institutes of Health notes that oxygen shortages prevent the brain from working as well as it should, and a 2023 study published in the journal Redox Biology found that oxygen abnormality plays a crucial role in the occurrence and progression of Alzheimer's disease.

### How should aging adults approach exercise if they have been largely sedentary?

Middle-aged and older adults who have not been physically active throughout their adult life but want to begin incorporating exercise into their daily routines are urged to speak with their physicians prior to beginning a fitness regimen. Preexisting conditions may make it difficult, if not impossible, to engage in certain forms of exercise. A personal physician can consider a patient's unique medical history and then recommend certain exercises that won't put him or her in jeopardy of suffering an injury or illness. A gradual approach to exercising is typically best for individuals who have lived a sedentary lifestyle. Starting off slowly with a short walk or light physical activity like gardening can help the body acclimate to physical activity at a safe pace. As adults bodies' become more accustomed to exercise, men and women can then gradually increase the intensity of their workouts, switching from walking to jogging on a treadmill when possible.

There is no cure for dementia, but adults are not helpless against the various forms of the condition. Researchers have discovered that preventive measures like routine exercise can be an effective way to reduce dementia risk.

## How nutritional needs change



Healthy eating is important at any age and can set the course for a life of vitality and wellness. Sufficient nutrition can help prevent chronic illnesses and make sure that growing bodies develop properly. As one ages, various changes take place

in the body, making healthy eating even more essential.

According to Healthline, nutritional deficiencies can effect aging individuals, which can decrease quality of life and lead to poor health outcomes. Individuals should pay attention to their vitamin and mineral intake at various ages so they do not miss out on important nutrients. As a person ages, here are some approaches to consider.

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- **Consume fewer calories:** According to Connie Bales, PhD, RD, associate director of the Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center at Durham VA Medical Center, people need fewer calories every decade. That's because individuals are moving around less and have less muscle. This causes a decline in metabolic rate.

- **Include more nutrient-dense foods:** Even though caloric needs go down with age, it's important to pack as much nutrition into the calories a person does consume. That means finding nutrient-rich foods like whole grains, fruits, nuts, beans, vegetables, fish, and lean cuts of meat.

- **Consume more lean protein:** Muscle loss and loss of strength can develop as a person ages. Healthline says the average adult loses 3 to 8 percent of their muscle mass each decade after age 30. Eating more protein could help aging bodies maintain muscle.

- **Eat fortified cereals and grains:** The ability to absorb vitamin B12 can decrease as one gets older and with the use of certain medicines. Many health professionals recommend patients get more vitamin B12 by consuming foods enriched with this vitamin. Vitamin supplements may be needed in addition to food.

- **Drink more fluids:** Health.com says sensation of

thirst declines with age. Drinking water and other fluids becomes a priority to stay hydrated. It also helps with digestion.

- **Prioritize bone health:** Osteoporosis is a concern for older adults, particularly women who have reached menopause. Osteoporosis occurs when bones become brittle and can break from only the slightest bump or fall, says the Mayo Clinic. Vitamin D and calcium help strengthen bones, and older adults may need more of these nutrients.

Individuals should speak with their health care providers and nutritionists for further insight into their changing nutritional needs. Such professionals can help customize diets to address specific health concerns.



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