

THINK AHEAD

Keep your brain healthy
and reduce your risk
of dementia



The New England Dementia Partnership acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we walk upon today as the First People of this country.










We pay respect to their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region.

We also acknowledge those community members who are at risk of developing dementia and those who are living with dementia, their carers and their families.

Those who are living with dementia are sometimes described as *moogil* or *wamba*.



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INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been written for the Aboriginal Community, to raise awareness of dementia and how to reduce the risk of dementia.

Dementia is not a normal part of getting older, it is a disease.

Dementia cannot be prevented or cured. However, changes to your lifestyle can help reduce your risk of dementia or delay the onset of dementia.

Following the advice in this booklet is not a guarantee against getting dementia. We all know people who have lived healthy lives but who have dementia. This isn't their fault.

Unfortunately, we just can't control all the factors that affect our risk of getting some diseases. But there are some risk factors we can control, so it is important to do what you can to stay as healthy as possible – for yourself and your family.



WHAT DOES DEMENTIA MEAN?

Dementia is a medical term. You may know dementia by another name, like *moogil* or *wamba*.

Dementia is a disease of the brain that involves changes in memory, thinking, behaviour, and how someone performs everyday tasks.

The symptoms of dementia can be caused by different diseases, including Alzheimer's disease, Vascular Dementia,

Dementia with Lewy Bodies, Frontal Temporal Dementia, or alcohol-related dementia.

When someone has dementia, it will gradually affect their ability to carry out daily activities, such as driving, shopping, getting dressed, eating, getting to and from places, managing money, reading, writing and speech. Over time, it can become difficult for the person who has dementia to live by themselves.

**Dementia is not a normal part of ageing
– it is a disease of the brain.**

**Many people live to a very old age
without getting dementia.**



ABOUT THE BRAIN

The brain is made up of many different parts. These parts work together to keep you alive, and to help you to understand the world around you.

The brain helps you to:

- Plan and organise things
- Make decisions
- Understand information
- Pay attention
- Behave appropriately
- Remember things
- Speak and communicate
- See, hear, taste, smell and feel
- Read and write
- Recognise people and objects
- Breathe
- Control your body temperature



What happens to the brain as we get older?

Changes can start to occur in our brains around middle age. These changes can affect the way our brain works as we get older, but may affect different people in different ways.

It is normal for some changes to occur in our memory and thinking as we get older. It might need a little more effort to remember something or work something out in our mind.

By looking after your health and keeping your brain active you can reduce your risk of getting dementia.

You look after your brain when you:

- Do things that make you think
- When you use new skills
- When you continue learning new things throughout life

Keeping your brain healthy is important for living a long and healthy life – it's as important as keeping your heart or body healthy.



REDUCING YOUR RISK

The risk of getting dementia increases with age. Most cases of dementia occur in older people. You can't do anything about getting older, but there are other risk factors that you can do something about.

Tips for reducing your risk:

- Exercise your **BRAIN** – keep your brain active
- Enjoy your **SOCIAL** life – be socially active
- Exercise your **BODY** – be physically active
- Eat a healthy **DIET** – eat plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Take care of your **HEALTH** – have regular health checks; manage your blood pressure, blood cholesterol, blood sugar and weight; manage sleep problems and depression; avoid tobacco smoke; and drink alcohol in moderation
- Look after your **HEAD** – protect your head from injury



EXERCISE YOUR BRAIN

Keep your brain active:

To keep your brain healthy, you need to keep your mind active. It's best to choose new or different activities, and those that challenge your brain – rather than continue with activities you are good at, or activities you have always done.

Tips for keeping your brain active:

- Try a new hobby, such as painting, craft or gardening
- Read the newspaper or different styles of books
- Write poetry or keep a daily journal
- Try out new recipes
- Visit your local library and learn how to use the internet
- Do jigsaws, crosswords, and puzzles
- Organise games nights and play board games or cards with family and friends
- Help the kids with their homework
- Enrol in a course such as computers, woodwork, photography, yoga or cooking
- Learn to dance or play a musical instrument
- Learn to speak another language
- Visit your local museum or a local play



ENJOY YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

Be socially active – participate:

To stay socially active, keep in touch with family and friends, and take opportunities to spend time with others. It can be as simple as chatting to people you meet at the local shops, visiting family, or phoning a friend.

You can also combine social activities with activities that are good for your brain, body and heart health. Be social in ways that interest you, you feel comfortable with, and you enjoy.



Tips for staying socially active:

- Visit or have a meal with family and friends
- Volunteer to help your favourite charity, local school, sporting or community group
- Check out 'what's on' in your community and participate in local activities
- Join a group such as a book club, walking group, social club, or church group
- Enrol in a class and meet new people
- Phone someone that you haven't spoken to in ages
- Organise to go to a concert, cinema or sports event with friends or family

Tips for staying socially and physically active:

- Go dancing with other people – you are constantly moving and you need to remember the steps
- Try tai chi or exercising in a group – it's social and it involves movement
- Go bushwalking with friends or family
- Go walking or fishing with a friend or family member

Joining in social activities is great for overall health, including heart and brain health, and it can help reduce your risk of dementia.



EXERCISE YOUR BODY

Be physically active:

Taking part in regular physical activity provides a range of health benefits, including lowering the risk of getting dementia.

It's recommended that you exercise for at least thirty minutes, most days of the week. It's also important to choose a variety of activities that help with general fitness, balance, strength and flexibility.

Benefits of physical activity:

- Improves blood flow through your body
- Improves brain function
- Reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers
- Lowers high blood pressure
- Builds healthy bones and muscles
- Assists with managing your weight



Physical activity is important for overall health – you need to be active every day, throughout your life, for the greatest health benefits.

For a healthy body and brain, it's important to choose a range of activities that you enjoy.

Tips for being physically active:

- Walk or ride a bike
- Take the dog for a walk
- Use the stairs instead of an elevator
- Park your car further away from where you need to go
- Meet a friend to go walking, cycling, or swimming
- At work, go for a walk at lunchtime with workmates
- Go to the park with your kids or grandchildren
- When watching TV, do some exercises while sitting
- If sitting for more than an hour, get up and move around, even if just for a few minutes
- Take up a sport, go the gym or go swimming
- Work your muscles using your own body weight by doing push-ups or squats





EAT A HEALTHY DIET

Eat for your health:

Healthy eating is important for a healthy body and a healthy brain. The brain needs a variety of nutrients to work properly, and it gets these from healthy food and drink.



Healthy eating guidelines:

- Eat a variety of foods from different food groups
- Include vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts, wholegrain breads and cereals, including pasta and rice
- Choose fish, lean meats, eggs, reduced-fat dairy foods and soy foods
- Choose monounsaturated and polyunsaturated oils such as canola, olive, sunflower, soy bean, safflower and flaxseed
- Limit foods high in saturated fat such as butter, deep fried foods, processed deli meats, pastries, cakes and biscuits



Tips for healthy eating:

- Add colour to your meals by aiming for five serves of different coloured vegetables each day – include them in sandwiches, salads and with your main meal
- Eat two pieces of fruit every day – add fruit to your cereal or yoghurt, eat as a snack or for dessert
- Plain, frozen or canned vegetables and fruit are nutritious and save on preparation time
- Choose wholemeal or wholegrain breads and cereals – they contain more fibre and they taste great too
- Eat a healthy breakfast to start the day
- Use reduced-fat milk or reduced-fat yoghurt on your cereal – reduced fat yoghurt makes a healthy dessert or snack
- Replace butter with margarine spreads or vegetable oils such as canola, olive, sunflower and safflower oils
- Eat fish – choose canned, frozen or fresh, and choose grilled rather than fried fish
- Choose lean cuts of meat or remove the fat before cooking, and remove the skin from chicken
- Drink plenty of water – it's convenient, cheap and a great thirst quencher

Eat healthy food for a healthy heart and a healthy brain.



TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH

Seeing your doctor regularly for check-ups will help maintain your health. Your doctor can help you to manage your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar levels and weight. If your doctor prescribes medication, make sure you take it.

Health checks (715 – Keeping You Alive) are a great way to keep you healthy and reduce your risk of chronic disease.

A health check can also give you access to allied health professionals, such as a physiotherapist, podiatrist, fitness advisor or dietitian.

Taking care of your heart reduces your risk of dementia – what's good for your heart is good for your brain.



Tips to keep your health in check:

- Visit your doctor and/or Aboriginal health team and talk to them about your health – they will support you and help you to understand your health needs
- Your doctor may also refer you to other health professionals such as a nurse, health worker, dietitian, diabetes educator, or heart doctor
- If you are overweight or obese, speak to your doctor for advice on how to lose excess weight – your doctor may also refer you to an Aboriginal health program in your community, so that they can support you with your weight loss

Manage sleep problems

Having a sleepless night every now and then isn't a health problem. But if you are having ongoing sleep problems, then you may be at increased risk of getting dementia. Many sleep problems are treatable, so if you aren't sleeping well, see your doctor or health worker.

Manage depression

Depression affects our brain. Depression may increase your risk of getting dementia. It's important to see a doctor or health worker if you are feeling depressed. They can talk to you about your options and offer you support.





Avoid tobacco smoke and smoking

Smoking is bad for our health. It increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer and other health problems. Smoking is also bad for our brain. Studies have shown that people who smoke have a greater risk of getting dementia. There is no safe level of smoking.



Tips for avoiding tobacco smoke:

- If you are a smoker, try to quit – seek advice from your health worker or see your doctor
- Call Quitline (phone 13 78 48) and ask for the Aboriginal Quitline – they can give you information and help you to quit smoking
- Try to avoid breathing in other people's tobacco smoke
- Ask family and friends to smoke outside, away from other people, and not to smoke in the house or car



If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation

Drinking large quantities of alcohol increases your risk of getting dementia. In fact, there is a type of dementia called alcohol-related dementia. People who regularly drink large amounts of alcohol over many years are at risk of getting alcohol-related dementia.

Some tips for taking care of your health:

- If you drink alcohol, limiting your intake to no more than

two drinks on any one day will reduce your risk of harm from alcohol-related disease

- Try to have at least two alcohol free days each week
- If you are drinking alcohol, remember to drink a glass of water in between each alcoholic drink
- Speak to your doctor if you have a health condition, as you may need to cut out alcohol altogether
- Avoid recreational and illegal drugs



LOOK AFTER YOUR HEAD

Protect your head from serious injury

People who have experienced a severe head injury, with a loss of consciousness for an extended period, are at greater risk of getting dementia. This doesn't mean that you will get dementia if you have suffered a serious head injury – just that your risk is greater than someone who hasn't suffered a head injury.

It makes sense that if we damage our head, we could also damage our brain and affect its ability to work properly. Small head injuries, such as a minor bump or cut to the head, are unlikely to lead to any serious health problems.



It's important to do what you can to protect your head.



Some tips to protect your head

- Wear a helmet whenever you ride a bike or motorbike – a helmet or headgear might also be needed when playing some sports
- When travelling in any type of vehicle, whether it is a car, boat, plane or bus, wear a seatbelt – if anything does go wrong, the seatbelt will offer some protection
- When using a ladder, make sure it is stable or someone is holding it steady
- Use handrails when walking up or down stairs, or using an escalator, to stop you from falling
- Also use the handrails when having a shower, and be careful when getting in and out of a bath
- Be careful crossing the road – watch out for cars and make sure they see you before you step onto the road
- Watch out for potholes or things that could cause you to trip and fall when you are out walking
- Watch out for trip hazards inside your home, such as loose rugs and mats, and slippery surfaces, such as tiled floors
- Before diving, always check the depth of the water and don't dive into shallow water



WHERE TO GO FOR HELP?

National Dementia Helpline (Your Story Matters)

Phone: 1800 100 500 – business hours

www.dementia.org.au

Lifeline (crisis support)

Phone: 13 11 14

Dementia Support Australia (behaviour support)

Phone: 1800 699 799

www.dementia.com.au

Emergency Respite Care

Business hours: 1800 052 222

After hours: 1800 059 059

My Aged Care

Phone: 1800 200 422

www.myagedcare.gov.au

National Australia Carer Gateway

Phone: 1800 422 737

www.carergateway.gov.au

Quitline (quit smoking – ask for Aboriginal Quitline)

Phone: 13 78 48 (7am to 10pm, 7 days a week)

www.quitnow.gov.au



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Health
Hunter New England
Local Health District



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