

BRAIN HEALTH

The brain is an incredible organ. It is made up of many different parts, all of which work together to keep you alive and allow you to involve yourself in, and make sense of, the world around you. Keeping your brain healthy is essential for living a fulfilling, healthy and long life. Your brain is your most valuable health asset; you need to protect it all your life. The evidence suggests that midlife is a critical time to think about looking after your brain, body and heart, but it is never too early or too late to make changes that will improve your brain health.

SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA

The changes in the brain that cause dementia begin many years before any symptoms appear. As we grow older, our brains change and we may have occasional problems remembering certain details. However, Alzheimer's disease and other dementias cause memory loss and other symptoms serious enough to interfere with life on a day-to-day basis. These symptoms are not a natural part of getting older:

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
- Trouble completing tasks that were once easy.
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.
- Changes in mood or personality; withdrawing from friends and family.
- Problems with communication, either written or spoken.
- Confusion about places, people and events.
- Visual changes, such trouble understanding images.



DEMENTIA

Dementia is not a specific disease; it's an overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms associated with a decline in memory or other thinking skills severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Memory loss is an example, but Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia. More than 342,000 Australians are living with dementia - a number expected to increase to 400,000 in less than a decade. Worldwide, at least 44 million people are living with dementia, making the disease a global health crisis that must be addressed.

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, and is a term for conditions that occur when the brain no longer functions properly. Alzheimer's causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. In the early stage, dementia symptoms may be minimal, but as the disease causes more damage to the brain, symptoms worsen. The rate at which the disease progresses is different for everyone, but on average, people with Alzheimer's live for eight years after symptoms begin.

RISKS FACTORS FOR DEMENTIA

- Age: The greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's is increasing age.
- Family members with Alzheimer's: Those who have a parent, brother, sister or child with Alzheimer's are more likely to develop the disease.
- Heart issues: The risk of developing Alzheimer's or vascular dementia appears to be increased by many conditions that damage the heart or blood vessels, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and high cholesterol.



- Traumatic brain injury: There may be a strong link between serious head injury and future risk of Alzheimer's, especially when trauma occurs repeatedly or involves loss of consciousness.
- Depression: Although not yet well understood, late-life depression, especially in men, may be an indication of the development of dementia.
- Unhealthy lifestyle: Being overweight or obese, a lack of physical activity, having a poor diet, smoking and excessive alcohol intake can all increase the risk of dementia.



5 SIMPLE STEPS TO MAXIMISE YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

1. Look After Your Heart

Your brain is nourished by one of your body's richest networks of blood vessels. Anything that damages blood vessels anywhere in your body can damage blood vessels in your brain, depriving brain cells of vital food and oxygen. Research indicates that having diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure, and not treating them effectively, can damage the blood vessels in the brain, affecting brain function and thinking skills. Other unhealthy lifestyle factors such as obesity and smoking are associated with an increased risk for dementia, and other conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and vascular disease and cancers. What's good for your heart is good for your brain.

2. Be Physically Active

There is strong evidence that regular physical activity is associated with better brain function and reduced risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Exercise gives our brain a healthy boost by increasing blood flow to the brain, stimulating the growth of brain cells and the connections between them, and is associated with larger brain volume. It reduces the risk of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and high cholesterol, which are associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia.

3. Mentally Challenge Your Brain

Scientists have found that challenging the brain with new activities helps to build new brain cells and strengthen connections between them. This helps to give the brain more 'reserve' or 'back up' so that it can cope better and keep working properly if any brain cells are damaged or die. Mental exercise may also protect against accumulation of damaging proteins in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease. It could be learning a new language, taking up a new sport, doing a course in something you've always wanted to do - anything really, as long as you're learning something new. Challenge yourself often and keep learning new things throughout life.

4. Have a Healthy Diet

Your brain needs a range of nutrients to function properly. A healthy, balanced diet may help in maintaining brain health and functionality. Several studies have found that a high intake of saturated fats, such as those found in meat, deep fried foods and takeaway food and trans fats often found in pies, pastries, cakes, biscuits and buns are associated with an increased risk of dementia. A diet higher in unsaturated fats or 'good fats', such as those found in fish, olive oil, avocado and nuts, is associated with a reduced risk of dementia. Foods that are high in antioxidants such as tomatoes, pinto and kidney beans, pecan nuts, cranberries, blueberries and oranges are also good for brain health. Go easy on the alcohol though, as drinking large quantities over time may increase the risk of developing dementia.

5. Enjoy Social Activity

Most of us are social beings and usually prefer the company of others rather than existing in isolation. It's always much more fun doing things with other people, to share experiences like going to the movies or a concert, take off on a trip somewhere or discover a new restaurant. To help look after your brain health it's important to be social with people whose company you enjoy and in ways that interest you. Research suggests that social activities that involve mental activity and physical activity such as dancing and team sports for example, provide even greater benefit for brain health and reducing the risk of dementia.



08 8354 9800



bookings@chg.net.au



www.chg.net.au



103 Henley Beach Rd Mile End
SA 5031