

# WELLNESS WORKS



June is brain health and Alzheimer's awareness month! In this edition of *Wellness Works* we are exploring the disease and giving some tips on how to keep your brain healthy and even improve your mood. It is never too early or too late to give your brain a work out and you might even find that it's fun!

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## Alzheimer's vs Dementia

Are they the same thing?

Dementia is not considered a disease, but rather a way to describe symptoms associated with declining memory and other brain activities that affect the ability to perform everyday tasks. Dementia is known to progressively worsen with time, though treatment options may be available to slow the process. Patients with dementia often have at least two of the following brain functions impaired: memory, communication skills, visual perception, judgement, and focus.<sup>1</sup>

Alzheimer's is categorized as a disease. It is considered a type of dementia that accounts for the majority of dementia cases. The most common early stage symptom of Alzheimer's is difficulty creating or remembering new information and/or memories. Alzheimer's prevents neurons in the brain from functioning properly which damages them and eventually causes the neurons to irrevocably die. Without neurons the brain is unable to perform basic functions like thinking and remembering.

## Just Normal Ageing

While this information may be unsettling, it is important to know the difference between forgetfulness due to normal ageing and forgetfulness due to dementia symptoms. Both ageing and dementia can lead to difficulty in remembering, planning, decision making, language, directional orientation, visual perception, and moods.

Some typical examples of ageing versus potential early dementia are the following:

**Ageing:** Occasionally forgetting acquaintances' names but remembering them later

**Dementia:** Forgetting recent events or the names of immediate family members or close friends.

**A:** Sometimes losing things like your phone or keys but being able to retrace your steps or remember where you put them later.

**D:** Misplacing things in places they do not belong, like the TV remote in the pantry.

**A:** Having some trouble multitasking, especially if there are other distractions, but still able to complete the tasks.

**D:** Being confused and lost when trying to make a plan and unable to multitask.

**A:** Having some difficulty finding the right words but usually figuring it out.

**D:** Frequently not being able to find the right words (needing others to fill in the blank). Finding it difficult to follow conversations.

**A:** Being concerned about your own memory declining, but your family members are not concerned.

**D:** Your family members are worried about your memory, but you don't think there is a problem.<sup>2</sup>



## Let's Play Some Brain Games

The verdict is still out on whether keeping an active mind is proven to help stave off dementia, but there are still plenty of studies that suggest challenging your mind can help to keep your thinking skills sharp. Try some of these fun games and activities to have a good time and maybe even strengthen your brain!

- Do a daily crossword puzzle or Sudoku.
- Play a strategy and communication game like Bridge. Keeping social connections is a good way to exercise your brain.
- Play a board game like chess or checkers. Maybe even set up a weekly game with your family!
- Download an online memory game or find an app on your smartphone for brain games on the go.
- Read and write. Sign up for a class at a local community college or community center.

It is never too early or too late to start working out your brain. Play with your friends, kids, parents, and grandparents!



## Get out and exercise

This is just your monthly reminder to get out and exercise! The Department of Health and Human Services recommends that most people should get at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise every week. That's less than 22 minutes a day!

### Beginner Levels

Make it a goal to get 5k steps every day for the next 30 days. Every step towards your health counts!

### Intermediate/Advanced Levels

Make it a goal to get 10k steps every day for the next 30 days. This will get you to the recommended 22 active minutes/day.

## June's Challenge

A new type of exercise at least one time each week this month. Exercise inspiration: hike a new trail, go for a bike ride, try a spin, yoga, or kickboxing class with a friend (many studios offer FREE trials), rent a kayak, canoe, or stand up paddle board, go rock climbing.

Try printing out an exercise log like [this one](#) to track your progress!

## Did you know?

Did you know that exercising actually increases brain activity? Besides the commonly known reasons to exercise, such as reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure; exercise can also protect your brain!

Regular exercise can help your thinking processes in both direct and indirect manners. By reducing inflammation, insulin resistance, and stimulating growth factors, exercise can help new blood vessels

grow in the brain and more new brain cells to survive longer. Indirectly, regular exercise can improve mood, aid in better sleep, and decrease stress. These are important areas to improve because a lot of cognitive issues can stem from them.

Many studies have even found that people who exercise have more volume in the prefrontal and medial temporal cortexes. These are areas of the brain that are in charge of thinking and memory, both skills that are at risk of declining as we age. At this point scientist are still studying the effects and what types of exercise is best. Most of the research has included walking and it is suggested that other types of aerobic exercise should also produce similar results.<sup>3</sup>

## Improve your Mood

Sometimes you just need a little pick me up to improve your mood. There are many options, but consider these 5 for a little inspiration when you are feeling down.

1. Just smile! Seriously, try it right now!
2. Drink some tea or coffee. Caffeine has been shown to improve mood and sometimes a warm drink just feels good.
3. Give a good friend a hug. Physical connection can release oxytocin, which is a happy feeling hormone.
4. Stop checking social media. Looking at other people *living their best lives* is only going to make you feel worse about yourself.
5. Do a random act of kindness. Not only will you cheer up someone else's day but you will feel good too!

The contents of this newsletter are for informational purposes only and not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice. Remember to always consult with a health professional if you have question about a medical condition, have an illness, or want to change your diet or exercise regime. If you have a medical emergency, call you doctor or 911 immediately.



## Garlic Soy Salmon

Give this 5-ingredient recipe a try! Not only is it yummy and easy to prepare, but it can also improve your mood. Studies have shown that Omega-3 fatty acids, found in high concentration in salmon decreases symptoms of depression.

### Ingredients

- 1 1/2 - 2 lbs. salmon filet
- 1/4 c soy sauce
- 2 cloves of minced garlic or 1Tbsp garlic powder
- 1Tbsp honey
- 1tsp finely grated ginger (optional)

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
2. Make the soy marinade: In a bowl stir together soy sauce, minced garlic (or garlic powder), honey, and ginger (optional).
3. Place the salmon in a shallow dish and pour marinade on top. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 mins, but no longer than 2 hrs.
4. Lightly grease a foil lined baking sheet and place salmon skin side down.
5. Bake for 12-16 mins. The salmon is done when it is opaque and flakes easily with a fork or knife.
6. Enjoy with a small squeeze of lemon!

<sup>1</sup> What is Dementia <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia>

<sup>2</sup> Normal Ageing vs Dementia <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/how-dementia-progresses/normal-ageing-vs-dementia>

<sup>3</sup> Regular Exercise Changes the Brain to Improve Memory <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/regular-exercise-changes-brain->