

# Brain health and dementia



Keeping your brain active is a great way to build reserves of healthy brain cells. It is also important for maintaining the connections between brain cells. According to the Brain Foundation, there are [many ways to keep your brain healthy](#).

Harvard Health says that [brainy activities](#) stimulate new connections between nerve cells. They may even help the brain generate new cells. This means you can develop neurological 'plasticity' as well as building a reserve of thinking abilities.

When you're older this could help delay the onset of dementia. Scientists think this is because the brain gets more opportunities to receive signals ([USU 2023](#)).



# Dementia

Dementia is a term used to describe a collection of symptoms caused by disorders affecting the brain. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia.

- [Healthdirect has up-to-date information](#) about types of dementia and related issues.
- [Dementia Australia provides free kits](#) that include their best resources. Expert knowledge and support is available in 38 languages.
- [Get free dementia education](#) from the University of Tasmania.
- [Learn about new drugs](#) that aim to slow diseases like Alzheimer's by up to 35% when started at an early stage ([ABC 2023](#)).

## Alzheimer's disease

Ongoing research and new discoveries about Alzheimer's disease continue to emerge. The genetics of Alzheimer's disease is complex. More than one gene mutation can be a cause. Also, genes on many chromosomes are involved.

Ten years ago, researchers found only 10 genes linked with Alzheimer's. Since then, scientists have discovered more than 70 ([NIH 2023](#)).

Genetics also explain only about a third of cases. This is because your actions and choices can positively or negatively change the way certain genes work. Your risk may increase because of factors like an unhealthy [diet](#), smoking, not [exercising](#), or head injuries.

# Lowering your risk

Physical and cognitive exercise can reduce your risk of dementia ([BMCG 2016](#)). Almost any type of mental activity may be beneficial. Activities with a social aspect are even better. Many of these examples offer a combination of mental, physical, and social benefits:

- Sports, [dancing](#), [gardening](#)
- [Arts](#), [crafts](#) and other hobbies
- Challenging yourself with games and puzzles
- Enjoying music or playing musical instruments
- [Reading](#) and [learning new things](#) from courses or media
- Getting out and about to places like museums, exhibitions or [community events](#) and activities

## What's good for your heart is also good for your brain

Oxygen is carried to the brain by blood vessels. You can keep your blood vessels healthy with what you eat, how much you move, not smoking and controlling your cholesterol and blood pressure. Keeping your heart healthy is something you can work on every day. The [Heart Foundation lists practical tips](#) for:

- Eating a heart healthy diet and being more active
- Smoke-free living
- Controlling your cholesterol levels and blood pressure

[Dementia Australia](#) also offers a range of resources for reducing your risk of developing dementia. You can also download their [Healthy brain, healthy life booklet](#).



## Dementia diagnosis, management and support

The [Department of Health and Aged Care](#) has helpful information on:

- Symptoms and when to seek help
- Diagnosis
- Dementia management
- Support and training options

[Kate Swaffer](#) is an award-winning Australian campaigner for the rights of people with dementia. She has reframed dementia as a disability that can be managed. Learn more at [Dementia Alliance International](#), and [Forward with Dementia](#).

# Supporting carers

Research has shown that with support, a good quality of life is possible. Not only for the person with dementia, but also for their carers ([Dementia Australia 2023](#)).

When caring for another person it is important to take care of your own health. Connect with others who understand and get support when you need it.

There are many non-profit and government funded programs and services. Healthdirect provides links to these [resources for carers of people with dementia](#).



## Training for family carers

Today, more is known about the symptoms caused by many disorders affecting the brain. There is also a better understanding of what it is like to experience these symptoms.

The focus is on supporting people with dementia and their family carers to live well at home. Training family members to care for their loved ones is having positive results.

After training, family members understand their loved one's behaviour. This makes it easier to manage day-to-day caregiving. As a result, the family member with dementia becomes more involved with activities. This is what a study of the [COPE program](#) found ([Gerontologist 2021](#)).

# More helpful information

If you need more information, get in touch with one of our helpful team on **1800 951 971**.

You can also find other tips and advice by following the links below:

- [The COPE program](#)
- [The National Dementia Helpline](#)
- [The Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline](#)
- [The Teepa Snow Positive Approach to Care](#)
- [Memory: Myth Versus Truth | Johns Hopkins Medicine](#)
- [Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Services](#)
- [Queensland Brain Institute brain and dementia publication](#)

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## CONTACT US

**Website:** [liveup.org.au](http://liveup.org.au)

**Email:** [support@liveup.org.au](mailto:support@liveup.org.au)

**Phone:** 1800 951 971

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/LiveUpAus](https://facebook.com/LiveUpAus)

LiveUp is a healthy ageing initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.