

# PHYSICAL EXERCISE & DEMENTIA

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## *Two very important questions:*

- 1. Can physical exercise reduce the risk of developing dementia?**
- 2. Can physical exercise help people living with dementia?**

### **The answer is YES!**

Physical exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, helping to maintain general fitness, and contribute to a sense of well-being. Physical exercise is also essential for maintaining adequate blood flow to the brain and may stimulate brain cell growth and survival.

Several research studies have found that physical activity in early, mid and late life is associated with a lower risk of cognitive decline and dementia – in one study, for Alzheimers Disease specifically, the risk was reduced by 45%. Studies looking into the effect of aerobic exercise, (an activity that increases one's heart rate) in middle-aged or older adults have reported improvements in thinking and memory, as well as reduced rates of dementia.

Not all research studies use the same definition of 'physical activity' or exercise, however, in general what they are referring to is aerobic exercise performed for a sustained period of time (eg 20 – 30 minutes), carried out several times a week.

The other good news is physical exercise does not just mean playing sports or running. It can also include brisk walking, housework activities or gardening. Although vigorous exercise seems to be the most effective, these non-traditional forms of exercise can offer a significant benefit.

In summary, of all the lifestyle changes that have been robustly studied in recent years, taking regular physical exercise appears to be one of the best things that one can do to reduce our risk of getting dementia, whilst also having a significant positive impact on the wellbeing of people living with dementia.

*References: Alzheimers Scotland; Dementia Australia*