

# 5 SIMPLE STEPS TO MAXIMISE YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

There are small steps that you can take in your everyday life that will make a real difference to the health of your brain and help reduce your risk of developing dementia later in life. These steps are also good for your general health, and can help lower your risk of other chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Looking after the health of your brain is important at any age, but it is particularly important once you reach middle age (around 40 to 65 years of age). The **5 Simple Steps to Maximise Your Brain Health** will help you keep your brain healthy and lower your risk of dementia.

## STEP 1 LOOK AFTER YOUR HEART



**What is good for your heart is good for your brain.**

Conditions that affect the heart or blood vessels, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and obesity, can increase the risk of developing dementia, especially if these occur at middle age.

### What you can do

- Have regular health checks to check your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and weight. Follow the advice of your health professional
- Seek help to quit smoking.

## STEP 2 DO SOME KIND OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

**Being physically active gives our brains a healthy boost.**



Regular physical activity increases blood flow to the brain and stimulates the growth of new brain cells and the connections between them.

Being active is also good for your heart and body.

### What you can do

- Doing any physical activity is better than doing none
- If you are currently not doing any physical activity, start by doing some, and gradually increase the amount you do. Speak to your doctor before you start any new exercise routine
- Build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on most – preferably all – days. This can be done in 10 minute blocks.

## STEP 3 MENTALLY CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN

**It is important to keep your brain active.**

Scientists have found activities that involve thinking and learning, that are new or challenge the brain, help to build new brain cells and strengthen the connections between them.

### What you can do

- Take up a new sport
- Learn a new language
- Have a go at a new hobby
- Start a course in something you've always wanted to do
- Anything really, as long as it's new, complex, and done often.



## STEP 4 FOLLOW A HEALTHY DIET



### What you eat can affect your brain health.

Our brain needs a variety of nutrients to function properly.

#### What you can do

For good brain health, choose:

- Lots of vegetables and some fruit
- Healthy fats and oils (polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats), such as olive oil, canola oil, instead of butter or coconut and palm oil (saturated fats)
- Fish
- Low-fat or fat-free (skim) milk, yoghurt and cheese
- Lean or low fat cuts of meat.

Eat less:

- Full fat milk, yoghurt and cheese
- Fried food and desserts, deep fried foods and takeaway food (high in saturated fats)
- Pies, pastries, cakes, biscuits and buns (trans fats).

If you drink alcohol, try and limit it to no more than 2 'standard' drinks on any day.

## STEP 5 ENJOY SOCIAL ACTIVITY



### Spending time with friends and family, or people whose company you enjoy, in ways that interest you, is good for our brain health.

Mixing with other people helps to build new brain cells and strengthen the connections between them, which can protect you against dementia.

Activities that combine being physically active, social interaction, and are mentally challenging, such as dancing, provide even greater benefit.

#### What you can do

- Be part of a club or social group
- Join a team, book club, walking group, or choir
- Volunteer in your local community
- Take up dance classes.

## WHAT ELSE?



Brain health also means looking after your mental health. See your health professional for advice on treating depression.

It's also important to avoid serious head injury, so be sure to protect your head.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on living a brain healthy lifestyle visit Alzheimer's Australia's [yourbrainmatters.org.au](http://yourbrainmatters.org.au) Or call the National Dementia Helpline

**1800 100 500**



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**