

# Having Hope and Living Well

Also available in Italian | Disponibile anche in italiano

This is a resource for the Italian community. It was developed together with caregivers of people living with dementia within the Italian community in Canada. A caregiver could be a family member, friend, or another person who is supporting a person living with dementia.

## This resource provides information about:



Having hope after a diagnosis of dementia



Strategies for living well with dementia including exercise, diet, rest, health, emotional wellbeing, and being mentally and socially active



## Having hope

Many people have positive relationships with their family doctor and other healthcare providers throughout their dementia journey. However, some people have negative experiences. In some instances, people living with dementia and their care partners were left with no hope they could live a fulfilling life following their dementia diagnosis and in others, people were not offered support, resources, or information to help them navigate the diagnosis.

**Forward with Dementia** was developed in partnership with people living with dementia and their caregivers, to provide resources and stories to inspire hope about living well following a diagnosis of dementia.

## Living well

Living well with dementia includes activities that support your physical and mental health, as outlined in the recommendations below.

### Exercise

Research shows regular exercise can support brain health and help people living with dementia continue to do daily tasks, and live in their own homes longer. Exercise increases blood and oxygen flow to the brain, and helps people to stay strong and mobile. Exercise can include:



**Aerobic exercise** (for example, jogging, walking, swimming, cycling, chair exercises)



**Strength training** (for example, lifting weights or using exercise bands)



**Everyday activities** (for example, housework, gardening, using the stairs instead of the elevator, or walking instead of driving)

## Exercise (continued)



Online or in-person group exercise programs. Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](https://forwardwithdementia.ca) to **Learn About Programs and Services.**

Visit [Dementia Wellness Canada](https://dementia.wellnesscanada.ca) for more healthy living recommendations.

## Eat and drink well

Some people living with dementia find their appetite changes over time, they forget to eat or drink water, or they have challenges with swallowing. Maintaining a healthy weight, and getting enough vitamins and minerals impacts how well the brain works. Eating well can include:



**Eating fresh, healthy food** including fruits and vegetables, legumes (such as lentils, peas, beans, chickpeas), nuts, whole grains, fish, seafood, unsaturated fats (such as olive oil, avocado oil), as well as some low-fat dairy.



**Having ready-to-eat foods available and visible** (for example, a bowl of fruit on the counter), to help with forgetting to eat or challenges with eating enough at meal times.



**Reducing intake of sugar, salt, red meat and processed foods.** Eat foods such as pasta and breads in moderation.



**Reducing or eliminating alcohol intake.** Heavy drinking may accelerate deterioration of dementia.



**Drinking 8-10 cups of water per day.** Make it a part of your routine to have a glass of water with every meal, as well as between meals.



**Talking to your family doctor if you notice changes in your appetite, or challenges with swallowing.** They may refer you to a dietician or speech language pathologist.

## Rest well

For some people living with dementia it can be mentally tiring doing their usual activities. They may also experience changes to their sleep patterns, including feeling tired throughout the day, or having trouble staying asleep at night. It is recommended to get 8 hours of sleep per night. Strategies to help with sleep can include:



- **Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day.** Limit daytime naps, especially if nighttime sleep is interrupted.
- **Getting exposure to daylight during the day. Reduce bright lights at night** and in the bedroom, such as televisions, phone screens, LED alarm clocks and streetlights.
- **Establishing a routine before bed**, including 30 minutes to relax.
- **Making your sleeping space comfortable.** For example, ensuring the room is quiet, at an appropriate temperature, and that the mattress, pillow, and bedding are comfortable.
- **Limiting beverages before going to bed**, to reduce the need to go to the bathroom at night.

## Attend to other health issues

When a person's overall health is well managed, their brain health will benefit. People living with dementia may have other chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, osteoporosis, asthma, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. They are at higher risk of experiencing other health conditions such as **delirium**, incontinence (loss of bladder or bowel control), visual problems, dental problems, and frailty. Strategies to manage overall health include:



- **Scheduling regular check-ups** with your family doctor, specialists, and other healthcare providers such as the dentist, eye doctor (optometrist), and ear doctor (audiologist).
- **Talking to your pharmacist** to create a plan to take medications correctly. For example, using blister packs.

## Attend to other health issues (continued)



- **Seeking lifestyle advice** from doctors or other healthcare providers.
- **Monitoring health changes**, and see your doctor if you notice changes.

**Delirium** is a sudden change in a person’s mental state. It can cause confusion, distress, changes in alertness, awareness of time and place, speech, and reasoning. It may be confused for dementia, but has a faster onset (over 1-2 days), and symptoms may vary more throughout the day. Delirium is considered an emergency. Learn more at the [Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health](#).

## Support emotional well-being

There is a strong link between your mental health, your mood, and how well your brain is working. Emotional well-being can impact how well someone living with dementia can manage challenges. Strategies to support emotional well-being include:



**Connecting to your culture.** Feeling connected to your heritage can help you to cope with changes related to dementia. This can include taking part in religious or spiritual practices, listening to music or watching cultural media, cooking and eating traditional foods, reminiscing with photographs, and connecting with friends, family and community.



**Taking care of yourself, being kind to yourself, and doing things just “for you”.** For example, getting enough rest, getting your hair done, or going for a walk.

## Support emotional well-being (continued)



**Continuing to do what is important in your life.** Use strategies and services to reduce the impact of dementia on your life. Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](https://forwardwithdementia.ca) for information about **Managing Changes**.



**Getting support if you experience changes in your mood,** such as feeling down, anxious or overwhelmed. This can include asking for and accepting help from others, as well as talking to your family doctor about medications and/or counselling.



**Joining a research study to help yourself and others by advancing dementia research.** Visit the [Research Institute for Aging](#) or [Alzheimer Society](#) for information.



**Becoming a dementia advocate** by speaking about your experiences with dementia, providing feedback on programs, or joining a committee. Speak to your local healthcare service, or visit organizations such as [Dementia Advocacy Canada](#) and [Dementia Alliance International](#).

**“My mother has advanced dementia and yet she knows the lyrics to all of her favourite songs. I have created a playlist of these songs and when I play them we both sing along together. It instantly makes her happy and it’s a wonderful way for me to connect with her.”**

- Caregiver from the Italian community

## Be mentally active

When people do activities that require mental effort, or concentration, there is more blood flow and brain cell activity in the brain. Being mentally active can include:



- **Volunteering.** For example: help out at a community event, with your church, or a local group.
- **Learning something new.** For example: a craft, a new device, or reading the newspaper.
- **Do something creative.** For example: play music, sing, dance, draw, crochet.
- **Play games and puzzles.** Play games and puzzles. For example: card games, word games, jigsaws, Sudoku.
- **Join online or in-person activities** independently or with a caregiver or friend. For example: programs at community centers, cultural centers, or the Alzheimer Society.

## Be socially active

People who know and spend time with a range of other people tend to have better brain health. Some people living with dementia describe how their diagnosis has brought them closer to some friends and family. Others describe feeling lonely or isolated. Here are some suggestions that might make it easier to socialize:



- Spend time with people you feel close to or supported by.
- Socialize in smaller groups.
- Socialize in quieter places.
- If you're tired, take a break from socializing.
- Talk on the phone or by video-chat.
- Write letters, emails, or send messages.



## Be socially active (continued)



- Join a support group with other people living with dementia. If you are interested, contact your local [Alzheimer Society](#) or [Dementia Alliance International](#).
- Look for dementia support services and programs that are culturally or language specific.



## Notes

Use this space to write down any notes, reflections, or questions you have about this resource.