



enhancing wellness

An inspirational guide
for people like us with early-stage memory loss

A "By Us For Us" Guide

introduction

How we live our lives, or the lifestyle choices we make, can play an important role in maintaining good health and preventing illnesses. When diagnosed with an illness causing dementia, a healthy lifestyle also becomes important in maintaining functioning, coping with stress, and “living well” with the disease. Research tells us that we may be less likely to develop Alzheimer’s disease or other related dementias (ADRD) and may be better able to tolerate changes experienced when diagnosed with dementia if we eat a diet that is rich in antioxidants, control or manage our cholesterol, exercise regularly, keep mentally active, and have supportive social networks. This guide, the fourth in a series, focuses on how enhancing physical, psychological and emotional, social and spiritual well-being can help us live our lives to the fullest extent, even after a diagnosis of dementia.

Although we will be referring to physical, psychological and emotional, social and spiritual wellness separately in this guide, in reality, all of these components of our lives overlap and are intertwined. Therefore, it is important to treat your mind, body, and soul as a whole. This is of the utmost importance so we can be the best we can be every day.

Two factors are important to enhance wellness for persons living with early-stage memory loss: being proactive and establishing routines. Being proactive allows you to take control of your life, which is a win-win situation – in gaining control you are in a position to not only improve the quality of your life, but also live a purposeful life. Further, developing healthy habits and creating routines will help keep you on track. Although it takes time to begin new routines, it will be worth it and will benefit you in the end because your daily routine can help you be the best you can be every day. Situations constantly change – that is okay. Reassess your personal situation on a regular basis to make the necessary arrangements.

Finally, continue to try to adapt to the levels of your present capabilities. Although this is a gradual and ongoing process, it is important to keep the life scales weighing in your favour!

Brenda Hounam
Person living with dementia
Advocate and Spokesperson

This booklet is dedicated in loving memory to
my beautiful little granddaughter,
LEAH JENNIFER WHITNEY.

maintaining physical well-being

you are what you eat

Healthy eating is an important element in maintaining, and enhancing wellness – a good diet leads to a clear mind. Eating well does not mean that you have to cut out everything that you enjoy; however, enjoy them in moderation.

Things to consider in developing healthy eating habits:



Eat foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Essential omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to slow the accumulation of amyloid and tau proteins in the brain. Food rich in omega-3 include olive oil and flaxseed oil, fish, including salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies and sardines, raw nuts and seeds. Further, consuming omega-3 has also been found to decrease the risk of heart disease, which is also a risk factor in dementia.



Drink red wine. Some research suggests that the antioxidant properties in red wine, specifically the flavonoids, can help reduce the risk of dementia. If you are not a wine drinker, you do not have to start drinking; however, if you already enjoy wine, 1 to 2 glasses per day is acceptable.



Drink green tea. Green tea is another beverage with antioxidant powers. It also contains EGCG: *Epigallocatechin Gallate*, which has been shown to possess anti-cancer, anti-aging and overall health benefits.



Enjoy foods rich in antioxidants. The antioxidant properties of flavonoids are also found in foods such as blueberries and pomegranates. Antioxidant rich foods help the brain against oxidative stress that causes brain aging.



Eat dark chocolate. Dark chocolate (75% or higher raw cacao content) is a cognitive enhancer containing flavonoids and antioxidants, which helps to increase blood flow to essential areas of the brain, and has been shown to enhance the processes of learning and memory.

-  Eat turmeric. Turmeric, or the curry spice, is another antioxidant and has been shown to reduce amyloid plaque in the brain.
-  Eat smaller amounts more often and avoid processed foods. This will help to maintain your blood sugar levels and will allow you to be more alert.
-  Drink water. Becoming dehydrated can result in increased memory problems and confusion.

According to Canada's Food Guide, if you are 51 years of age or older your daily food intake should include:

-  **7 servings of vegetables and fruit** – one serving could include 1 piece of fruit; 125 mL (½ cup) fresh, frozen or canned vegetables or fruit or 100% juice.
-  **6-7 servings of grain products** – one serving could include 1 slice (35 g) bread or ½ bagel (45 g); 125 mL (½ cup) cooked rice, pasta, or couscous.
-  **3 servings of milk and alternatives** – one serving could include 250 mL (1 cup) milk or fortified soy beverage; 50 g (1 ½ oz.) cheese.
-  **2-3 servings of meat and alternatives** – one serving could include 75 g (2 ½ oz.)/125 mL (½ cup) cooked fish, shellfish, poultry or lean meat; 2 eggs.
-  **30 - 45 mL (2 to 3 Tbsp) of unsaturated oils and fats** – one serving could include 5 mL (1 tsp) of soft non-hydrogenated margarine; 5 mL (1 tsp) of canola, corn, flaxseed, olive, peanut, soybean or sunflower oil.

“My wife and I make a point to prepare the evening meal together and to enjoy eating it together. Have cut out sugar intake, better balanced meals, less meat and more fish. Feel better/more positive.”

– David Knight, early-stage support group member,
Alzheimer Society of Guelph

taking care of your body

In order to take care of your body, you need to be proactive. This means researching and understanding your previous and current health conditions, understanding the effects of your diet, being knowledgeable about the medication you are taking, and being active in making decisions related to your health care.

Things to consider for a healthy body:



Control and monitor your cholesterol and blood pressure. Untreated, they can negatively affect your brain health. Use diet and exercise to control these health issues.



If you need medication to control blood pressure, cholesterol or for any other reason, understand the medication you are taking, how they interact with other medications, potential side effects, and so forth.



Don't forget to rest. Napping is a great way to feel refreshed – a quick nap in the afternoon works wonders.



Visit your doctor regularly and take your medication as prescribed. Work with your doctor to take care of your body.



Exercise your brain daily. For example, reading the newspaper or completing a crossword every morning can be a great routine to establish and is a great way to keep your brain active (refer to the first guide in this “By Us For Us” series – *Memory Work Out* – for more ways to exercise your brain).

“I as a person have not changed...only my mind.”

– Eileen Stevenson, early-stage support group member,
Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region

being active

The World Health Organization maintains that being physically active can assist in the management of Alzheimer's disease. In fact, research suggests that physical activities are important for maintaining or enhancing cognitive functioning as we age. Simple activities, including taking a walk outside or inside on rainy days, weeding the garden, mowing the lawn, or biking can be beneficial in many ways. For example, being active can reduce the risk of depression and provide a sense of social, psychological and emotional well-being. It can also help to maintain a healthy weight, lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and help you sleep better – all of which can have a direct impact on brain health.

You need to like what you are doing, however, or else you will not keep up the routine. So choose something that you enjoy. Challenge yourself in a variety of ways through physical activity – it will make your routine more enjoyable and more likely that you will continue doing it.

Things to consider to enhance physical well-being:



Consult your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



Walking up and down your stairs at home can provide an easy and inexpensive cardio workout.



Swimming and aqua fit classes are low impact and easy on the joints and a great form of resistance training. Aqua fit also allows for socialization.



Dancing is a great form of exercise and can also provide mental and social stimulation, for example, learning ballroom dancing requires that you remember steps and it is done with a partner.



Take up tai chi or yoga. They are both forms of relaxation and can also provide mental stimulation because it is necessary to remember the routine.

“About one year ago after returning from the cottage, I noted I was gaining weight. My son suggested I should walk at least 4 times a week about 3.2 km. Being close to Stone Road Mall, I can walk inside and OUT year round.”

– Moe Freeman, early-stage support group member,
Alzheimer Society of Guelph

beyond the physical

being centred

Psychological and emotional health are just as important as physical health. Dealing with grief and loss is an issue that most of us deal with, especially after diagnosis. And as our abilities change throughout the progression of the disease, we may continue to experience grief and loss. Learning how to live with and transform grief and loss are extremely important. Likewise, we need to minimize stress to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Be careful not to put yourself in situations where you will encounter stress, and keep your emotions in check. This will help in maintaining a level existence. If you cannot avoid stress, try to keep it short term if possible, and learn coping strategies that help you manage the stress in your life.

Things to consider to enhance psychological and emotional well-being:



Don't be ashamed of your disease, it is an illness the same as any other. As persons with memory loss, we need to teach others how to support us. Let people know you have dementia; often they will be more considerate and understanding. Don't be afraid to ask for help.



Accept your new reality and allow yourself time to grieve.



Allow for emotional release. It is part of the grieving process and is healthy, as long as there is a balance between feeling down and being positive.



Keep a journal of your feelings.

“Create happiness for others...as a result you'll feel happy too.”

– John Stulen, early-stage support group member,
Alzheimer Society of Brant,
and the John Noble Home, Day and Stay, Lead Program

-  Try to let things go and do not allow your emotions to fester inside you. End or minimize negative relationships.
-  Do not worry about making mistakes and forgive yourself if you do.
-  Do things that allow you to feel a sense of purpose and contributing – even something small like peeling potatoes provides a sense of contributing and is an emotionally uplifting thing. It can also help you feel like a member of the family.
-  Participate in meaningful leisure activities. Research demonstrates that older adults who participate in leisure activities are happier and more content, are more satisfied with their lives, and have lower levels of psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and negative emotions.
-  Try to be the best you can and do something positive every day.
-  Accept that the disease may cause you to say and do things that may not be appropriate sometimes – persons with dementia and family care partners need to be tolerant of those situations.
-  Pets and children are very therapeutic. They give us love, don't judge us and know when we're having an off day.
-  Avoid self-pity. Laugh and smile, give and receive hugs every day.
-  Enjoy the little things that life has to offer. We cannot change what has already past, so focus on today, and don't worry about tomorrow because tomorrow has not yet come.

“My husband was finishing my words, finishing my thoughts. I took him aside privately and said it wasn't helping. I said I know you are trying to help, but it's just making me mad, if I stumble around let me, it was only making me frustrated. Unless you tell a person, 'this is not helping me', they don't know. Inside I was really struggling, if you don't tell them – you have to speak how you feel.”

– Yvonne Braet, early-stage support group member,
Alzheimer Society Sarnia-Lambton

staying connected

Social engagement and support help to reduce the impact that stressful life events, such as coping with the diagnosis of dementia, can have on well-being as we age. Know and appreciate how important family and friends are to your overall health and well-being. We can utilize our family and friends by working together and openly communicating needs and expectations. Being socially active is fun, it keeps you active, provides mental stimulation, maintains language skills, connects you with people with similar interests, and provides companionship and a sense of accomplishment (refer to *Enhancing Communication* – the third guide in the “By Us For Us” series, for tips on how to communicate with family and friends).

Things to consider to enhance social well-being:



‘Bite the bullet’ and push yourself to be socially involved – recognizing our limits and communicating those limits to our family and friends.



Embrace your moments of ‘built-in happiness’, share those things with your partners in care so they can bring them up with you when you are feeling down.



Embrace your personal support network. Your family and friends are so important – identify one person who can be your trusted friend you can vent to when needed.



Get out and live – go to a movie, the theatre, out for dinner, shopping, or volunteer.



Do things that allow you to engage with other people, for example, consider joining a bridge club, go bowling, entertain, go to church, join a social group or a sporting team, go dancing, exercise at a gym, or attend an adult day program.

“My wife and I have contact with a wider group of people. These people have similar problems to us; we feel less alone”

– Moe Freeman, early-stage support group member,
Alzheimer Society of Guelph

living in peace

Continue to live your life with basic fundamental core values and do those things that give you inner peace, for example, some people find meditation helpful. Also, try to live your life with a sense of purpose. Get involved – become a volunteer, or join a group. Keep living life! Maintaining spiritual well-being allows you to find inner peace, gives you purpose and pleasure, helps others, can be instructional and inspirational, can enhance relationships with others, can provide faith and hope, can be relaxing, and can provide stimulation and a sense of security.

Things to consider to enhance spiritual well-being:



Live a good life and do right by other people.



Pray, attend church or watch/listen to religious programming from home.



Belong to a religious club or get involved in a spiritual community.



Have faith, meditate or reflect on life, listen to music or read a book.



Spend time with family and friends.



Help others or volunteer in your community.



Spend time in the outdoors, take a hike.



Take time for yourself, solitude is a good time for reflection.

“The first time I couldn’t say the “Hail Mary” I cried. That is when I began meditating. Religion is just a word, meaning ‘to bond us to something’. Going to church is not the only way. Do what suits you.”

– Gail Robinet, early-stage support group member,
Alzheimer Society of Brant,
and the John Noble Home, Day and Stay, LEAD Program

endorsement for the guide

I continue to be impressed with the work this group has completed. The basic message is positive thinking. This, in fact, holds true for all illnesses. The benefits of positive thinking have been shown in scientific studies and can affect a range of hormones that impact on the immune system as well as other organ systems. In addition this guide promotes personal responsibility for health including lifestyle choices such as proper diet, exercise, discontinuation of smoking, weight control and responsible alcohol consumption. These factors not only influence disease states such as dementia, but also improve self esteem which also affects health.

I support this guide wholeheartedly and encourage all individuals, both those with and those without dementia, to read and then re-read this booklet. Take one step at a time and don't feel discouraged if you can't do everything. Every little bit helps.

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I would like to offer my congratulations to the “By Us For Us” team for providing these wonderful tools for living and wellness. The recommendations made by the members of the team not only provide a guide for persons living with the day to day challenges of dementia, but a recipe for successful living for everyone. One needs to “treat your mind body and soul as a whole” according to Brenda and be proactive when it applies to our health. Developing healthy habits and routines will create a purposeful lifestyle and improve quality of life. The tips and strategies and wellness promotion in the Enhancing Wellness guide provides a concise plan to enhance general well-being

As an educator and program director of the Day and Stay Program an adult day service, which offers three special programs for persons with dementia, I use the “By Us For Us” guides with students learning about dementia as well as caregivers who come to us for help. The previous guides have been

extremely beneficial and I am excited about having two new tools to use when advocating for understanding the needs of individuals with dementia. Maximizing strengths, focusing on abilities and wellness is the key to living with an illness causing memory loss and the strategies. The guides provide suggestions from persons living with the challenges of dementia to help others who are on the same journey.

It has been my privilege to get to know some of the individuals who have worked so hard to put the five guides together. I thank each and every one of you for sharing your experience on the challenges you face daily and for having the courage to develop the “By Us For Us” guides. The resources you have put together will truly make a difference in the lives of those touched by memory loss.

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The “By Us For Us” guides have been requested and used by persons with dementia, family members and professional care partners across the world. They are so widely sought after because they provide relevant information based on the “lived” experiences of those living with memory loss and they present that information in an accessible way. I want to thank Brenda Hounam and all of the individuals living with memory loss who have contributed to the guide by being willing to share with others their experiences and the ways in which they “live” with dementia. You are an inspiration to us all. And, all of us can learn how to enhance our own wellness from this guide.

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HOMEWOOD
Health Centre

references

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Health Canada, *Canada’s Food Guide*, (downloaded October 2008) available online at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/Food-Guide-aliment/basics-base/quantit-eng.php>

we welcome your input

If you've been diagnosed with early-stage memory loss and would like to comment on this guide or suggest topics for future guides, please contact us at www.onemorememory.com.



To order additional copies of this guide or any other guides in the series, contact:

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