Physical activity can help you to manage symptoms of dementia.

How much physical activity should I do?

To manage and improve your symptoms of dementia, try to sit less and move more on most days of the week.

Aerobic, resistance, flexibility, and balance activities training can help improve your symptoms of dementia.

- **Aerobic activities** work your heart and lungs, such as walking, cycling, jogging, cross-country skiing, and swimming.

- **Resistance activities** strengthen your muscles, such as push-ups, squats, lifting weights, and aquatic exercises.

- **Balance and flexibility activities** can improve your range of motion and stability, reduce your risk of falls, and prevent injury and strain, such as tai chi, pilates and yoga.

Start at a level that is right for you

When you begin a new activity, start at your own comfort level.

As you become used to doing the activity, you can slowly increase:

- **how long** you are active,
- **how often** you are active,
- **how many** activities you do,
- **how hard** you work.
As exercising becomes easier, challenge yourself by increasing the intensity.

**Monitor your intensity**

Use the “talk test”:

- *low-intensity activity* is when you can talk or sing with ease; you do not experience any shortness of breath.
- *moderate-intensity activity* is when you can talk, but not sing.
- *vigorous-intensity activity* is when you are unable to say more than a few words before you need to pause for a breath.

Examples of low- to moderate-intensity activities are walking at different speeds, gardening, swimming, and cycling.

Examples of moderate- to vigorous-intensity activities are brisk walking, jogging, and cycling.

**Aerobic Physical Activity**

Aerobic activities work your heart and lungs, such as walking, cycling, jogging, cross-country skiing, and swimming.

The following table describes your physical activity “prescription” for aerobic activities.

*Use the “talk test”. Moderate-intensity activity is when you can talk, but not sing.*
Aerobic Physical Activity Prescription

**HOW MUCH?**

- Warm up for 3–5 minutes *before* aerobic exercise.
- Aim for *150 minutes of aerobic activity per week*. For example,
  - 10 minutes, 3 times/day for 5 days,
  - 30 minutes/day for 5 days, or
  - 50 minutes/day for 3 days.
- Cool down for 3–5 minutes *after* aerobic exercise.

**HOW HARD?**

Aim for a *moderate- to vigorous-intensity* level.

Moderate- to vigorous-intensity activity means:

- your heart beats faster,
- you are sweating lightly,
- breathing is deeper and faster,
- you can still talk easily, but not sing.

For those with advanced stage dementia or physical limitations, low- to moderate-intensity exercise may be more appropriate. You can begin with seated exercises and progress to modified standing exercises, such as holding onto a stable surface. An exercise specialist can help guide you.

What aerobic activities would you like to do?
**Resistance Physical Activity**

Resistance activities help to strengthen your muscles, such as push-ups, squats, lifting weights, and aquatic exercises.

**Work all your major muscle groups**

It is important to do resistance activities for all of your major muscles.

- Choose 6–10 different activities for each session.
- Start at any duration and intensity and slowly increase them as you feel comfortable.
- Do each exercise slowly in a controlled way.
- Alternate between muscle groups to speed up your workout by allowing some muscles to rest while you work others. For example, you can choose a lower body exercise, such as squats, followed by an upper body exercise, such as chest presses.
- If you feel pain or cannot complete your set, the intensity may be too high. Reduce the weight you are using or the number of repetitions you are doing.
- Over time, you can slowly increase the number of sets that you do for each activity or slowly increase how much you lift.

*Do each exercise slowly in a controlled way.*
The following table describes your resistance physical activity “prescription”.

### Resistance Physical Activity Prescription

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW MUCH?</th>
<th>HOW HARD?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Do one “set” of an exercise for 10–15 repetitions, such as 10–15 bicep curls.</td>
<td>• Aim to work at a <em>moderate-intensity</em> level. This means:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aim for:</td>
<td>▶ your heart beats slightly faster than when you are resting,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ 6–10 different resistance exercises,</td>
<td>▶ you are sweating lightly,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ 1–3 sets of <em>each exercise</em> per session,</td>
<td>▶ breathing is deeper and faster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ 2–3 days per week.</td>
<td>• Your muscles should feel exhausted by the end of the set, that is, you cannot do another repetition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Rest</em> for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ 2–4 minutes before starting a new set or muscle group,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ at least 1 day between resistance training sessions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What resistance physical activities would you like to do?
Balance Physical Activity

Balance is important as you age and can be practiced daily or as often as possible. Balance activities improve your motor skills and coordination, as well as reduce your risk of falling. They can be simple exercises, such as standing on one leg. They can include resistance or flexibility activities that emphasize balance and coordination, such as tai chi, pilates or yoga.

Activities should be challenging, but you should not feel unsafe, like you are about to fall. Use supports, such as a chair or walker, if you are at risk of falls while doing the activities.

Examples of seated activities:
- range of motion exercises using arms and legs, such as arm or leg circles,
- coordinated movement of arms and legs.

Examples of standing exercises that can be done with or without hand support:
- standing on one foot,
- standing with feet close together,
- sit-to-stand,
- dynamic movements, such as kicking and catching,
- walking sideways and backwards or walking on or near a line.

Balance Physical Activity Prescription

**HOW MUCH?**

Aim for *at least*

- 30 seconds of holding your balance
- 15-30 minutes per session,
- 2–3 days per week.

**HOW HARD?**

Aim for a *moderate-intensity* level. This means the activities:

- are challenging,
- require concentration, and
- may require you to hold a chair or wall for support sometimes.

What balance physical activities would you like to do?
**Flexibility Physical Activity**

Flexibility physical activity improves your range of motion. Daily flexibility activity is the most effective. Do a variety of stretches that target both upper and lower body muscle groups. Include some stretching regularly in your warm-up and cool-down every time you exercise.

If the stretching activities are too hard, ask an exercise professional how to adapt them to match your level of flexibility.

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**Flexibility Physical Activity Prescription**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW MUCH?</th>
<th>HOW HARD?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim for at least</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stretch to the point of mild discomfort or tightness (but not pain) and hold the stretch.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2–4 repetitions of each exercise targeting the major muscles,</td>
<td>• Build up to holding stretches for 30 seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 10–15 minutes per session,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2–3 days per week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What flexibility physical activities would you like to do?

Note: A qualified exercise professional can show you what exercises work best for you and how to work at a safe intensity. Try to find facilities and physical activity professionals who have worked with individuals who have dementia.
How does physical activity help my dementia?

Being physically active has many benefits for your health. It can strengthen your muscles, improve your mobility and improve your ability to perform activities of daily living, which can help you to maintain your independence. Exercise can also improve your balance, which could reduce your risk of having a fall.

Physical activity can also help with your mental health such as attention, memory, thinking, decision-making, and problem solving, and it can potentially slow down the amount of mental health decline.

It is easier to maintain than to regain function—the sooner you can begin the better!

More benefits

Being physically active on a regular basis can give you many other benefits, such as:

- improving how well you sleep,
- improving your mood,
- improving your confidence and self-esteem,
- boosting your energy,
- improving your heart health,
- reducing your risk of certain conditions, such as stroke, which can affect your mental health,
- reducing your risk of osteoporosis or bone loss,
- giving you chances to meet with old friends and make new friends.

Physical activity can improve your ability to perform activities of daily living.
Remember:

- A combination of aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility activities can help you manage the symptoms of dementia.
- You will see many other benefits from being more active.
- Keep it fun! Make physical activity a lasting part of your life.

What is one thing you can do today to start being more active?

A combination of aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility activities can help you manage the symptoms of dementia.