

Brain Health PRO in a Nutshell



Knowledge

It is possible to **lower your risk of developing dementia**. Factors such as physical health, diet, sleep, sensory and social health can reduce your risk of developing dementia.



Action

To lower your risk of dementia, implement positive **lifestyle changes**, such as exercising, sleeping well, solving sensory problems, or by having an active cognitive and social life.



Social & Psychological Health

Knowledge: Having a large and diverse social network with regular interactions supports your brain health.

Action: Reconnect with older friends, pursue your hobbies, exercise with your friends and family, and take on volunteer or mentorship roles.

Cognitive Engagement

Knowledge: Engaging in new cognitively stimulating activities increases your cognitive capacities.

Action: It is never too late to improve your cognition and your memory, so start now! Begin by learning new skills and by learning and applying memory strategies.

Sleep

Knowledge: Sleeping well strengthens your immune system, helps maintain your overall health, and improves your memory and cognition.

Action: If you are having trouble sleeping, do not resort to medications right away. Begin by practising relaxation techniques before bed, and adopt a good sleep hygiene.

Vision & Hearing

Knowledge: Sensory loss, such as loss of hearing and/or vision, is common among older adults, and it increases with age. Communication relies on the senses and is necessary for a socially, mentally and physically active life.

Action: Check your hearing and vision and have them treated if needed. It will make social communication easier and more enjoyable, and you will remember information better.

Vascular Health

Knowledge: High blood pressure is the most important risk factor for heart disease and stroke. A healthy blood pressure can prevent a stroke, heart attack, and dementia.

Action: Increase your physical activity, improve your diet, and talk to your doctor about blood pressure.

Physical Activity

Knowledge: Physical activity like jogging, swimming, cycling, or walking can improve brain function.

Action: Incorporate physical activity into your day and your week.

Nutrition

Knowledge: Good nutrition includes eating vegetables every day which is known to lower your risk of Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Action: Explore new healthy foods and try them with your friends and family! Think about the types of foods recommended in Canada's Food Guide and the Brain Health Food Guide.

Brain Health Overview



Knowledge

Brain Health Pro answers questions on **dementia** and on how to **keep your brain healthy**.

- It is possible to **lower your risk** of developing mild cognitive impairment and dementia.
- For most people, symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease appear **after the age of 60 to 65**, known as late onset.
- Research shows that those who have **a positive attitude toward aging live 7.5 years longer** than those who have negative attitudes.

Addressing factors such as **sleep, diet, social health, and physical health** can reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease.

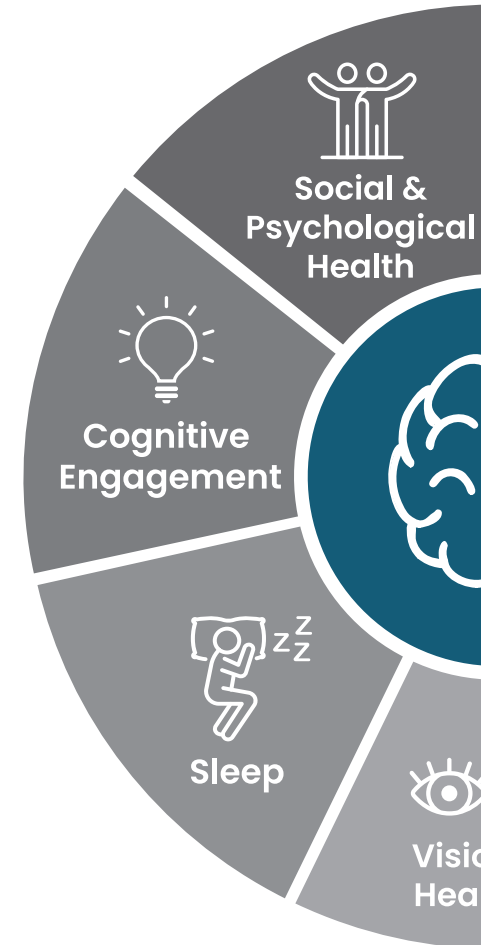


Action

To lower your risk of dementia, **implement positive lifestyle changes**, such as exercising, sleeping well, or having an active social life.

- **Mind over matter** - change can happen if you have a positive attitude and believe that you can change.
- Changing your lifestyle can be difficult. **Setting goals to measure your progress**, and sharing them with your friends and family, can help.

Every small change is a step in the right direction.



Physical Activity



Knowledge

Physical activity, which **includes any physical movement**, is important for brain health, as dementia risk increases with age.

- **Exercise** is a type of physical activity; it is done with the intent to improve physical fitness.
- **Age is the main risk factor** for dementia and Alzheimer's disease.
- Specific exercise training (e.g., running, lifting weights) is proven to improve brain structure and function. **A generally active lifestyle reduces the risk of dementia.**

There are **many types of exercises**, including aerobic (jogging, cycling, swimming), flexibility, resistance (lifting weights), and balance training.

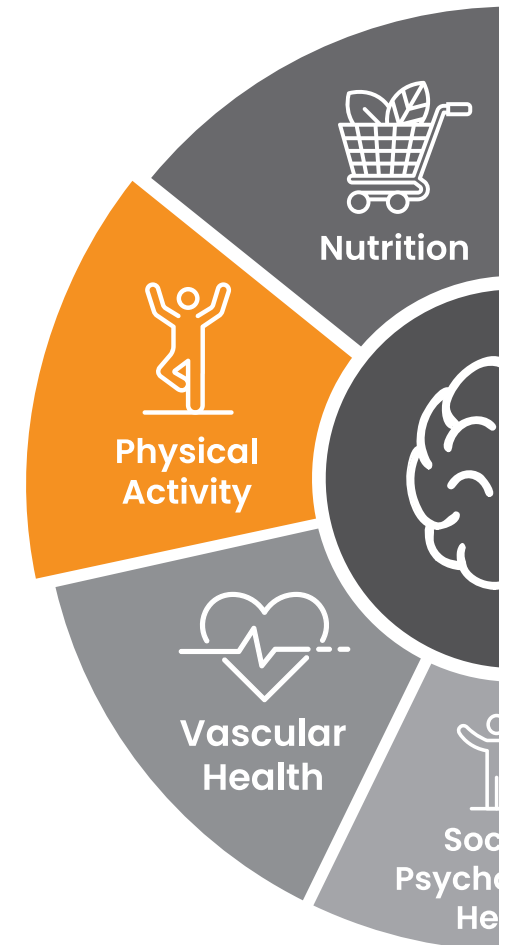


Action

Incorporate physical activity (take the stairs) and **plan exercise** (when, what, and where) into your day.

- Find activities you enjoy and try them with your friends and family. **Start slowly.**
- The easiest way to begin is by **walking.**
- Many exercises can also be **done at home**, for example, jogging on the spot, skipping rope, doing squats.
- Aim for **moderate intensity** when exercising (30 minutes per day, 5 days per week).
- You can **break the 30 minutes** into bouts, such as 5 or 15 minutes of exercise at a time.

Do physical activity at home and through household activities, or through hobbies and recreation.



Cognitive Engagement



Knowledge

Cognition changes with age. There are many cognitive processes. Some may remain stable and not change, while others may even improve with age.

- **Learning new skills** and learning and applying memory strategies help improve cognition.
- **Don't be afraid of external aids.** Use a calendar or an organizer to prevent schedule overload or conflicts. They are known to be great memory aids.

People who engage in many stimulating cognitive activities are known to live longer and suffer less cognitive decline over time.

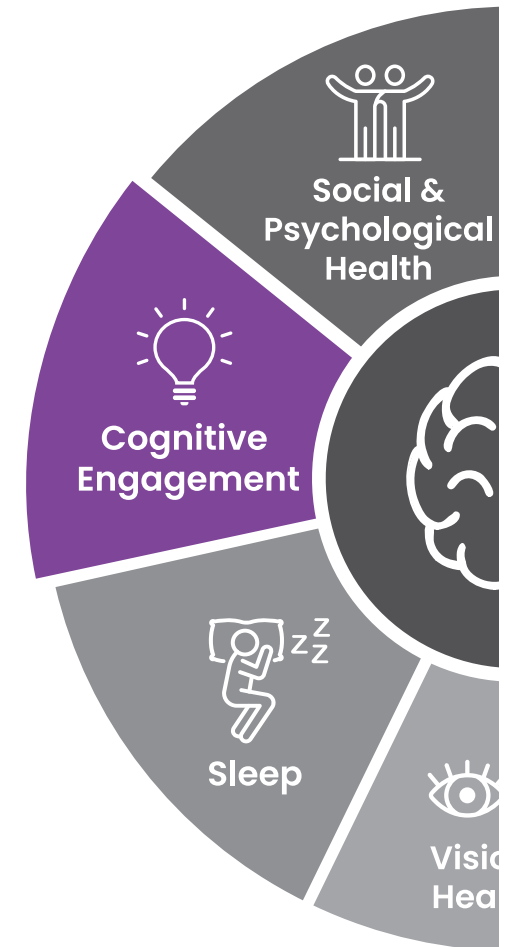


Action

It is **never too late** to improve your memory and cognition. Start now!

- There are many **memory strategies** that can be used in daily life.
- Increase the number of **cognitively stimulating activities** you do every week.
- The activities can be of many types. What is important is that they are **varied and enjoyable**.
- Try to move out of your comfort zone by learning and practising **new cognitive activities** or by gradually increasing their difficulty level.

What is important is to use memory strategies often so that they can be a **part of your daily life**. **Practise and repeat** them with your friends and family!





Knowledge

Good nutrition helps to **grow new brain cells and increases the connections between brain cells.**

- Research shows that those who eat well usually experience less memory loss.
- **The Mediterranean diet**, like Canada's Food Guide, is rich in plant foods, healthy fats, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and recommends consuming more fish and less red meat. The Brain Health Food Guide is similar and emphasizes key foods linked to preventing dementia.

Research shows that **people who eat lots of plant-based foods** such as vegetables and fruits every day **are at a lower risk for Alzheimer's disease**, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

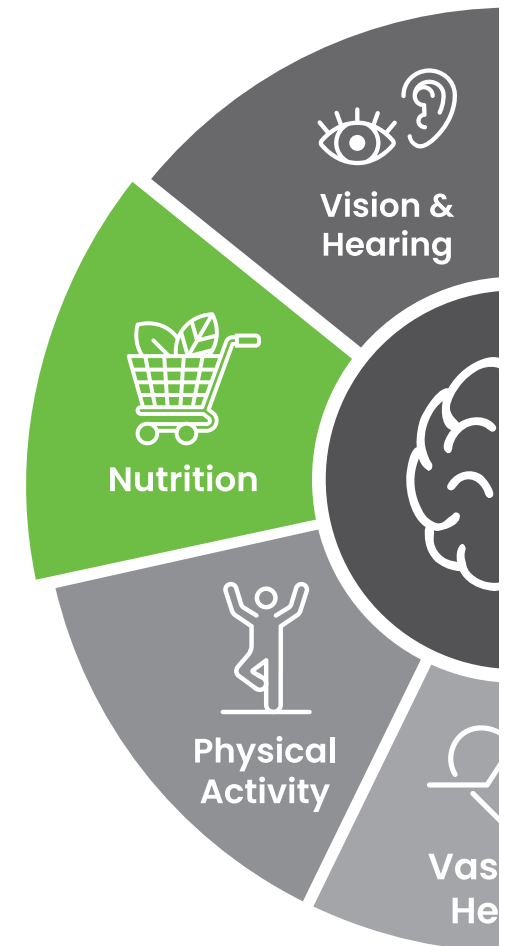


Action

Think about the types of foods recommended in **Canada's Food Guide** and the Brain Health Food Guide. Consume these foods more often.

- **Try smaller and more frequent healthy meals or snacks** throughout the day to get the nutrients needed.
- Making a **grocery list** can help you remember which foods to buy.
- **Limit processed and packaged foods** as these often have higher fat, salt and sugar content than whole foods.

Trying to change your diet may feel overwhelming. Think of small changes you can make.





Knowledge

Sleep helps maintain your physical, emotional, psychological health, and improves your memory and cognitive health.

- Your sleeping brain controls the release of hormones, **strengthens your immune system**, and **supports your heart health**.
- Lack of sleep will result in less patience and more irritability. It can lead to anxiety, burnout, and depression over time.

Sleep changes throughout life, and as you age sleep becomes lighter and more fragmented. You are likely to become more sensitive to stressors as well.

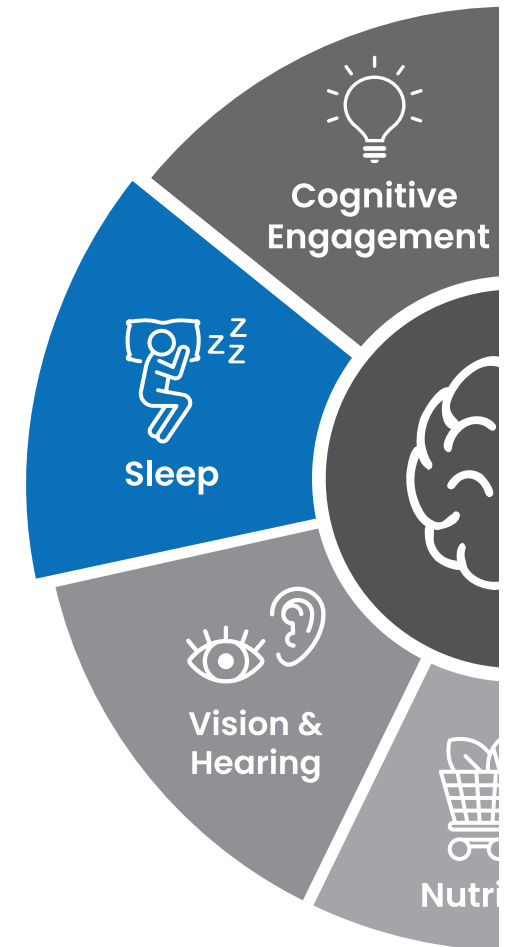


Action

To maintain a healthy body clock, try to **expose yourself to sunlight during the day**, follow a schedule, exercise, and most importantly wake up at the same time every day.

- If you are having trouble sleeping, do not resort to medications right away.
- Begin by **practising relaxation techniques before bed**, and adopt a good sleep hygiene.

Having a **regular schedule, avoiding stimulants in the evening**, and having an optimal sleeping **environment**, will facilitate good sleep.



Social & Psychological



Knowledge

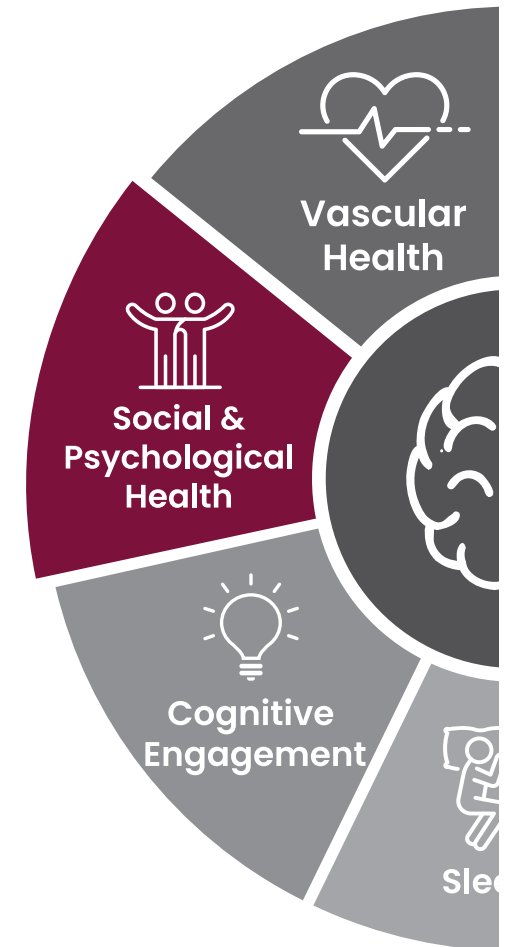
Having a large social network and a diverse one with **frequent social interactions promotes and maintains your brain health**, however, focus more on the **quality of your social ties rather than the quantity**.

- Retirement, bereavement, relocation, and chronic health conditions can reduce the size of your network and decrease social engagement.
- **Having connections or friendships with children or younger adults** promotes increased life satisfaction, results in less stress, and reduces loneliness.
- Feelings of stress, sadness, and worry are normal and healthy reactions to life events. Long-term stress can lead to anxiety, depression, and memory problems.
- **Depression and anxiety** are not normal parts of aging, and they **can be treated**.



Action

- Identify one way you would like to strengthen your relationship with others and **create a plan**. For example, ask your cousins if they would be interested in setting up weekly get-togethers, or ask friends if they would like to exercise with you.
- **Reconnect** with old friends, interact with people of all ages, **pursue hobbies**, and **take on volunteer or mentorship roles**.
- **Using technology and social media** is also a great way to expand and maintain your social network.
- Think about things you can change to **reduce stress in your life**. This can include a change in perspective about a stressful thing.
- Consider your perceptions about aging. **Aging is a normal part of life**, and it has many positive aspects.
- Learn about mindfulness practices like **yoga** or **meditation** and give them a try.
- **Consult a health professional** if you experience anxiety or depression for more than two weeks, if it affects your daily functioning, or if you have self-harm thoughts.
- Consider therapy, and medication to treat depression and anxiety.



Vascular Health



Knowledge

- **Cardiovascular disease** (disease of the heart and blood vessels) is related to cognitive impairment and is the second most common cause of dementia.
- **Stroke** is the second most common cause of death, and it is a leading cause of disability.
- **High blood pressure** is the most important risk factor for heart disease and stroke. A healthy blood pressure can reduce the risk of stroke and heart attack. A healthy blood pressure should be below 130/80.
- **Drugs and alcohol** can have negative effects on your brain and vascular health. You are at increased risk of type 2.

You are at an increased risk of type 2 diabetes if you are **over 40**, have **a parent or sibling with diabetes**, have **high blood pressure** or **cholesterol**, or are **overweight**.

Managing cardiovascular health (blood pressure and cholesterol) can help reduce the risk of heart disease, cognitive problems, and dementia.

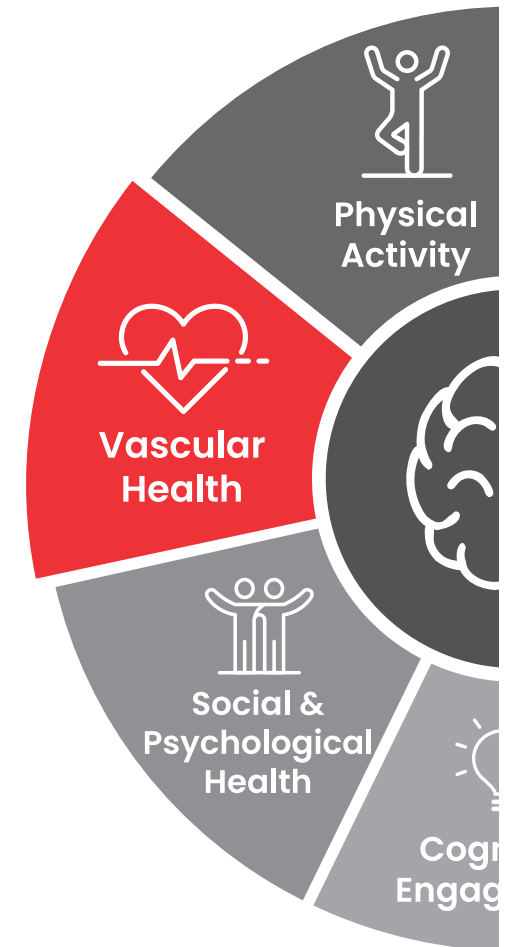


Action

Increase your **physical activity**, **improve your diet**, and if prescribed by your doctor, **take the necessary medication** to reduce your risk of stroke or diabetes.

- **Regularly check your blood pressure** at your doctor's or at a local pharmacy, or purchase a blood pressure monitor to use at home.
- Consult your doctor immediately if your blood pressure exceeds 180/120.
- **Exercise** on your own, with friends and family, or in group fitness classes, and receive guidance from a trainer, a physiotherapist, or an occupational therapist if necessary.

Make lifestyle changes to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and cognitive impairment or dementia, such as **managing your diet**, **engaging in physical activity**, **managing stress**, drinking **alcohol in moderation**, and reducing or **quitting smoking**.



Vision & Hearing



Knowledge

Sensory loss is common, and increases with age. Hearing and vision are the second and third most **common impairments** globally.

- Age related changes in your senses typically start in your 40s. By **75 years of age**, 50% of Canadians have at least **mild vision or hearing loss**.
- Declines in sensory function are often observed before declines in cognitive performance like memory difficulties.
- **Sensory declines are risk factors for dementia**, and you may be able to reduce these risks.

Sensory health is key to staying physically, mentally, and socially active, and can support brain health.



Action

- Get your **vision and hearing checked regularly**, so problems can be detected and treated early.
- **Protect your vision and hearing**, for example, by wearing sunglasses when outside, and avoiding noisy environments.
- Don't let your sensory problems keep you from living your life as fully as possible.

There are many solutions out there waiting for you, including **using technology**, **adjusting your attitudes and behaviours**, and **modifying your environment to your needs**.

Let your friends, family, and the people around you be part of the solutions.

