

MEMORY LOSS

A guide to reducing your risk

Research shows that 40 per cent of dementia can be prevented and that once a diagnosis has been made, there's plenty we can do to hold back a decline in our thinking skills.

This **Age UK Barnet** guide shows why it's so important to keep challenging yourself and that **it's never too late** and **it's never too early** to protect yourself from dementia and memory loss.



Read on for science-backed lifestyle tips to help keep your brain healthy



What is dementia?



Our brains control everything we think, feel, say and do. They also store our memories for us. Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain that damage brain cells and the links between them, and stop a person's brain from working properly. When someone has one of these diseases, they may have problems remembering, thinking and speaking. They might say or do things that seem strange to others, and find it harder to do everyday tasks. They may not seem like the person they used to be.

Is all dementia the same?

No two types of dementia are the same. In different types there is damage to different parts of the brain. The most common type is Alzheimer's disease, which tends to start slowly and progress gradually. Vascular dementia after a stroke often progresses in a 'stepped' way. This means that symptoms are stable for a while and then suddenly get worse. Everyone experiences dementia in their own way. Lots of things can affect this, including the person's attitude to their diagnosis, their lifestyle and physical health.



Your heart and your brain

There's more and more evidence to indicate that what's good for your heart is also good for your brain. Maintaining your cardiovascular health can be crucial in protecting your brain and lowering your risk for different types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Why it's important to try new things

Challenging your brain and learning new things is an important way to protect yourself from cognitive decline, according to neuroscientist Professor Catherine Loveday. 'Our brains are flexible and plastic which means that they have the ability to change and adapt as a result of experience,' says Catherine. So when we learn something new to us – how to paint or a language, for instance – it stimulates our brain by firing up different nerve cells and activating new pathways and circuits in the brain.

'This plasticity means that by stimulating our brains through challenging and new activities, we will be not only get better at what we're doing, other cognitive skills such as problem solving, memory and attention span may improve,' says Catherine.

6 ways to boost your brain power!

There's no sure way to stop dementia and memory loss but there's plenty you can do to make it less likely that you will. The following lifestyle advice will also help slow down cognitive decline even after a diagnosis



Keep your weight healthy

Eat a healthy balanced diet. Too much sugar in the diet has been linked to memory problems - it also leads to weight gain, another risk factor.

Try something new! Join one of our cookery classes and sign up to one of our nutrition talks on eating for a better brain.



Test your brain

Staying mentally active is linked to lower risk of memory problems. It's not clear which activities may be most beneficial but doing things you enjoy, whether that's reading, crosswords, singing or playing an instrument, will help to keep you mentally active.

Try something new! Anything you've never done before will test your brain - from tai chi to singing and art classes.



Be sociable

Social isolation is linked to a higher risk of dementia. Keeping socially active by connecting with other people or joining clubs can be a good way to feel happier, healthier and more positive in life. Frequent engagement helps strengthen neural connections in the brain, slowing normal age-related declines. It may also help make our brains more resistant to the effects of ageing, which can delay the onset of dementia.

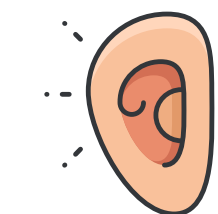
Try something new! Why not sign up to our social walks or online singing



Manage stress

Persistent stress can take a heavy toll on the brain, leading to shrinkage in a key memory area, hampering nerve cell growth, and increasing the risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Yet simple stress management tools such as breathing techniques and yoga can minimise its harmful effects and protect your brain.

Try something new! Try our mindfulness workshop or a tai chi class



Take regular hearing tests

A report by the Lancet Commission shows that hearing loss is the largest modifiable risk factor against dementia. Even a moderate hearing impairment can increase one's dementia risk, which may be due to increased social isolation and less stimulation.

'Stimulation of the mind increases the number and strength of connections between the brain cells, strengthens the brain cells one has, and even increases the number of brain cells slightly'

Neuroscientist

Professor

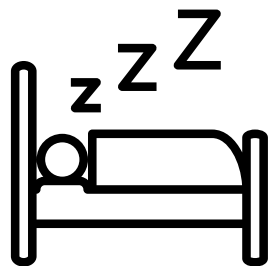
Catherine Loveday

...and more science-backed ways to boost your brain power



The Mediterranean diet

A Mediterranean diet also appears to lower the risk of developing mild cognitive impairment and slow the progression to dementia in people who have the condition. That means fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, and olive oil, and includes moderate amounts of fish, poultry, and dairy products, while limiting red meat.



Get your zzzzs

A good night's sleep is linked to lower levels of cognitive decline which may be because learning and memory are consolidated during sleep.

Try something new! Our mindfulness workshop offers tips on relaxation



Exercise regularly

People who are active have a lower risk of memory and thinking problems.

Try something new! You can try virtual tai chi, keep fit and Bollywood dancing, or one of our social walks in parks and open spaces around the borough



Smoking and drinking alcohol

According to Alzheimer's Research UK, quitting smoking is probably the most important step you can take to protect your heart and your brain. And ideally, you should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week.



Brush your teeth and visit the dentist

Studies have linked gum disease with cognitive decline and dementia

A Harvard Health study found that exercising can offer mental and social stimulation while improving blood flow to the brain, possibly even prompting the release of molecules that repair brain cells and create connections between them in people with mild to moderate memory loss.

Can I stop my dementia from getting worse?

It's never too late to change your habits. Even after a diagnosis of dementia or if you have mild to moderate memory loss, there's plenty you can do to slow down cognitive decline, according to Catherine Loveday. Much of the advice for people with memory loss is similar to the advice for preventing memory loss

THE BRAIN QUIZ

How well do you know your brain?



1 Which is the thinking skill which is the first to decline with age?

- a) Ability with numbers
- b) Ability with memory
- c) Speed of thinking
- d) Problem solving skills

2 What percentage of people have a typically male or female brain?

- a) 8%
- b) 38%
- c) 78%

3 True or false?

There are more connections between nerve cells in your brain than there are stars in the Milky Way?

4 How much energy does your brain use?

- a) 2%
- b) 5%
- c) 20%

5 How much of the brain is made up of water?

- a) 40%
- b) 55%
- c) 75%

6 Looking after which of these organs has the greatest impact on dementia risk?

- a) Your lungs
- b) Your kidneys
- c) Your heart



ANSWERS

- 1: c) For most people it's speed of thinking, although most people think it's memory.**
- 2: a) 8%** Research from Tel Aviv university found that less than 8% of brains fell into the all female or all male category. The vast majority of us lie somewhere on that continuum and some of us may well be positioned toward the opposite end for our sex
- 3: True. Your brain is the most complex thing in the universe. There are around 100 billion nerve cells (known as neurons) in the brain, each one connected to thousands of other cells.**
- 4: c) 20%** Your brain is only 2 per cent of your body weight but uses 20 per cent of your energy. Brain cells need much more energy than other cells in your body and are always active, even when you're asleep.
- 5: c) 75%. This means that dehydration, even as small as 2%, can have a negative effect on brain functions. Dehydration and a loss of sodium and electrolytes can cause acute changes in memory and attention.**
- 6: c) Your heart** What's good for your heart is good for your brain. Looking after your heart health, including controlling blood pressure and being physically active, can help lower your risk of heart disease and dementia too – particularly Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

'We're making the most of life!'

Saj, 67, is busier than ever after taking early retirement



'I retired early at 60 after a busy job as a scientist and thought I'd be sitting around all day, taking it easy. In fact, before I knew it I was volunteering for Age UK Barnet, sharing my love of cooking as a cookery volunteer. And soon my life was busier than ever. I now write cookery books and I love trying out new things. I enjoy painting, travelling, I've learnt felting and have just started Forest School!!'

Scilla, 82, a former consultant psychiatrist who has accelerated memory loss, is a fan of walking and word games.



'The problem isn't going to go away so you've got to get on with life and live with it. I know how important exercise is and since getting my dog, I've been doing an hour's walk a day. I feel the benefits of exercise. It keeps me thinking and gives me fresh air. It also makes me think clearer as it gives me a brighter outlook on life. It helps me realise that I can still remember things and that I'm not completely doolally! I play word games on my computer like online scrabble. I play against my daughters and with other players online. You find words that you didn't know you remembered. I love it because it gets my brain working, it's stimulating and I enjoy the added social element.'



'Hobbies and staying fit keep me sharp,' says volunteer walks leader Syd, 78

'I played football for an over 50s team until I was 63 and I'm still involved in the club. I've played tuba in a band for nearly 40 years, performing regularly and learning new pieces. I practice half an hour a day. I also read a lot, do crosswords, avoid sugar and salt and go for long walks with a friend most weeks. It all keeps my mind and body working!'

Jenny, 75, a volunteer for Age UK Barnet thinks connecting with people is the key to her mental wellbeing



'I just like speaking to people. I'm the person sitting at the bus stop chatting to everyone that comes past. I can't help it - but I get so much from talking to others. I think human contact and connection is what makes us happy. I always say yes to things - coffee mornings, social groups, volunteering - it always leads to something interesting!'

Although we lose 2 per cent of our brain cells every year after the age of 20, it's still possible to make what we have work better. 'Often, we are just losing the cells we don't need,' says neuroscientist Professor Catherine Loveday, 'and with the right lifestyle choices, it's possible to make new connections, whatever your age.' Some things even get better: 'Knowledge is robust and generally people get wiser as they get older.'

Finding the right support

National organisations

Age UK has a selection of dementia guides you can download from the website (www.ageuk.org.uk) plus a dementia advice line - 0800 678 1602.

Dementia UK offers specialist support to families living with dementia. Call its dementia helpline on 0800 888 6678 for support from dementia specialist Admiral Nurses.

Alzheimer's Society – find information, advice and useful factsheets on the website (www.alzheimers.org.uk) as well as details of local Dementia Cafés which offer activities, games, talks and discussion in a relaxed social setting. Call its Dementia Connect support line on 0333 150 3456.

Alzheimer's Research UK - research charity which has plenty of useful information on genes and dementia risk on its website (www.alzheimersresearchuk.org)

Arts 4 Dementia - supports people with dementia and their carers through art, singing and dance. Check out www.arts4dementia.org.uk to find an event near you.



Dementia support in Barnet

Age UK Barnet - Living Well Services

Specialist dementia advice and day opportunities for people living with dementia and their carers in East Finchley and Hendon. Activities include singing, arts and crafts, cognitive stimulation therapy. Tel 020 8203 5040 or email info@ageukbarnet.org.uk
Website: www.ageukbarnet.org.uk

Dementia Club UK – organises regular get-togethers for people living with dementia and their carers.

Tel 07956 858913 Email: lisa.rutter@dementioclubuk.org.uk
Website: www.dementioclubuk.org.uk

Singing for the Brain - to help people build on their memory for song and music. To find a session near you, tel: 0203 725 3001 or email: Barnet@alzheimers.org.uk

Support for carers

Age UK Barnet runs a weekly carers group as well as a dementia advisor service supporting carers of people living with dementia. Tel 020 8203 5040

Dementia Club UK runs a weekly carers group. Tel 07956 858913

Barnet Carers Centre offers information, advice and support for carers. Tel: 0203 995 1909 or email admin@barnetcarers.org.
Website: www.barnetcarers.org

An active older age

Activities for older people in Barnet

Age UK Barnet offers a wide range of activities and events on line and face to face including exercise, art, knitting, cookery, discussion and book groups, singing, games and music performances. Tel 020 8203 5040 or email info@ageukbarnet.org.uk

Barnet University of the Third Age (U3A) - offers interest groups, regular talks, and a number of social events. For more info and how to join, check out the website: www.barnetu3a.org.uk

Friend in Need (Fin)- activities for older people living in East Barnet. Tel 020 8449 8225 or email fin@fin-eastbarnet.org.uk

Barnet Asian Women's Association - lunch clubs and activities for Asian women in Barnet. Tel 020 8368 3077 or email admin@bawaonline.org

Barnet African Caribbean Association - events and day opportunities for older African and Caribbean people. Tel 020 8202 0095 or email: baca@barnetmcc.org

Jewish Care – health and social care organisation serving the Jewish community: activities, day opportunities and dementia services. Tel 020 8922 2222 or email helpline@jcare.org. Website: www.jewishcare.org

Barnet Wellbeing Service- a link to services and activities to promote wellbeing. Tel 03333 449 008 or email info@barnetwellbeing.org.uk



How Age UK Barnet can help

For advice about benefits, grants, housing and money concerns, phone our **Later Life Planning Service** on 020 8432 1417

For our **Living Well dementia adviser** service, please phone 020 8203 5040

Feeling a bit lonely and isolated? For friendly weekly chats, try our **Befriending Service** on 020 8432 1416

For essential jobs in the home please phone our **Handyperson Service*** on 020 8150 0963.

Our **Shopping Service*** is for people who need a light weekly shop. For more info, phone 020 8150 0963

Footcare* - basic nailcutting and a podiatrist service. For an appointment, phone 020 8203 5040

*There is a small charge for this service.

Get in touch!

Contact Age UK Barnet on 020 8203 5040 or email info@ageukbarnet.org.uk.

Website: www.ageukbarnet.org.uk

Our activities and services take place in 2 venues

Living Well Hub 1

**The Ann Owens
Centre, Oak Lane**

East Finchley N2 8LT

Living Well Hub 2

**Station Road
Hendon**

NW4



This booklet was produced with the support of **Barnet Council Public Health**, working with members of **Dementia Friendly Barnet** to improve the lives of people in Barnet affected by dementia

