



IGA
Institute of Geriatrics
and Active Ageing

Cognitive Health





Cognitive Health
2

Normal Ageing vs. Dementia
3

Maintaining Cognitive Health
4

Care for Our Health
5

Eat Right
6

Physical Well-being
8

Mental Well-being
10

Social Well-being
12

General Resources
14

Cognitive Health

Cognition refers to mental processes such as acquiring knowledge, paying attention, memory, judgement, reasoning, problem solving and decision making. It is displayed in our daily activities; some examples include reading and understanding global news, planning for budgets and bills, grocery shopping, taking public transport and navigating to your destination, reasons for making certain decisions, etc.

What is Cognitive Health?

Cognitive health, in relation, is our ability to think clearly, learn and remember. As we age, we may experience declines in some cognitive functions such as processing speed, memory and problem solving.

While all of us experience cognitive ageing as a lifelong process, age-related changes vary highly across individuals, due to differences in our health status, life experiences, lifestyles, education, socioeconomic status, genetics etc.

With people living longer lives now, it is therefore important for us to remain cognitively healthy to enjoy our golden years.

Importance of Good Cognitive Health



Maintain and improve our quality of life and well-being



Preserve our independence and capacity to function



Reduce the risk of dementia and other health conditions

Normal Ageing vs. Dementia

It is important for us to know that **dementia is NOT part of normal ageing**. We may get more forgetful, need longer time to remember things, or lose focus more easily when we get older. These changes are part of normal ageing for most of us.

So What is Dementia?

Dementia is a medical condition that severely **affects the brain's functions and abilities, beyond what may be expected from normal ageing**. In dementia, the decline in memory and other thinking skills is severe enough to significantly impair a person's activities of daily living, work and social interactions. These cognitive deficits in persons with dementia usually begin gradually and progressively worsen over time.

Though dementia is more commonly seen in older persons, it is important to remember that it is an illness and **not part of the normal ageing process**.

Then What is Alzheimer's Disease?

There has often been confusion over the terms dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Dementia is not the disease itself, but a general term used to describe a **set of symptoms** including impairment in memory, attention, orientation, judgement, problem solving ability and other thinking skills. In contrast, there are many causes of dementia.

Alzheimer's disease is the **most common cause of dementia** worldwide, and usually progresses slowly over 7 to 10 years. Other causes of dementia include vascular dementia, Parkinson's disease, dementia with Lewy bodies, frontotemporal dementia among some.

Maintaining Cognitive Health



1 Care for Our Health

As we grow older, it is important to take care of our health to improve our overall well-being. This allows us to continue enjoying an active and fulfilling life, and prevent illnesses that seem to be part and parcel of ageing.



Get regular health screenings to prevent illnesses, or detect them in the early stage for prompt treatment

Manage our chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure (hypertension) and high cholesterol (hyperlipidaemia)



Keep an **updated list of all our medications**, especially if we are seeing more than one doctor

QUICK TIPS

Ensure we have **sufficient sleep and maintain a regular sleep schedule**



Avoid excessive consumption of alcohol and smoking

Reduce our risk of brain injuries such as using handrails, walking aids, fastening seat belt



2 Eat Right

Our overall food intake tends to decrease as we age, with potential decline in our sense of hunger, taste and smell. Good nutrition is therefore important in older adults, to maintain a healthy brain and body functions, protect against chronic diseases, boost our immune system, recover from illnesses etc.

1. Eat a variety of foods to maintain a balanced diet

- ◆ Choose a variety of foods from the main food groups to ensure our diet contains as many different nutrients as possible.
- ◆ Use My Healthy Plate as a guide to help us create a balanced meal.

- ✓ **Fill half** our plate with fruits and vegetables
- ✓ **Fill a quarter** plate with whole grains
- ✓ **Fill a quarter** plate with meat and others



2. Include omega-3 fatty acids in our diet

- ◆ Omega-3 fatty acids are good fats that help boost our brain function.
- ◆ Good sources of omega-3 fatty acids include cold-water fatty fish (salmon, sardines, mackerel and tuna) nuts and seeds (walnut, chia seed), canola oil.



Salmon



Sardines



Walnut



Canola Oil

3. Reduce saturated and trans fats in our diet

- ◆ Saturated and trans fats raise the 'bad' cholesterol level in our blood.
- ◆ Sources of saturated fats include fatty beef, pork, lard and cream. Sources of trans fats include cakes, cookies, chips, fried food and margarine.

3. Drink adequate water & other fluids

- ◆ Drink adequate amount of water and other fluids during the day (unless our doctor advises otherwise).
- ◆ Stop fluid intake 2 hours before bedtime.

3 Physical Well-being

Physical exercises have a protective effect on our brain and its mental processes. Exercising also helps maintain/improve our strength and balance, in addition to perking up our mood.

Even light or moderate exercises, such as walking on a regular basis, can reduce the risk of mental decline.

1. Remain physically active

- ◆ Exercise regularly. If we have not been exercising previously, start slow. Walking is a good start.
- ◆ Besides walking, other great exercise choices include cycling, dancing, swimming and gardening.
- ◆ Aim to move around 30 minutes for most days.



2. Safety tips for exercising

- ◆ Perform 5 – 10 minutes of warm-up and cool-down stretches before and after each exercise session.
- ◆ Wear comfortable clothes and flat-soled fitting shoes for our exercise sessions.
- ◆ Drink sufficient water before, during and after exercising.

3. Exercise only when we are feeling well

- ◆ Do not exercise and further stress our body when we are sick.
- ◆ Stop the exercise and seek medical assistance if we experience pain or discomfort in the chest, excessive shortness of breath, dizziness or nausea, profuse sweating, muscle cramps, or severe joint pain.

4 Mental Well-being

Our brain is able to retain its cognitive abilities even in old age. Being intellectually engaged helps our brain build functional reserves to compensate for age-related brain changes.



Engage in mentally stimulating activities such as playing mahjong, chess, crossword puzzles, Sudoku, reading and knitting

Engage in meaningfully activities such as volunteering or hobbies



Learn something new such as a new language, musical instrument, photography, quilting etc

Keep our mind active through everyday activities such as mentally calculating our grocery purchases instead of using a calculator



Use it or lose it! The more we use our brain the more reserve we build



2	9	4					5
7				1	3		
						8	9
			8	6	5		
1	8		5	9	3	6	
	6		3	2			
6	2						
		1	2				7
5					2	4	8

Try Sudoku!

- ◆ The grid has 9 x 9 spaces, with 9 squares of 3 x 3 spaces.
- ◆ Fill each row, column and square (9 spaces each) with the numbers 1 – 9, without any repeats.

5 Social Well-being

Staying connected with others through social activities and programmes can keep our brain active and allow us to feel more engaged with people and surroundings around us.

1. Social Network

- ◆ Being socially active does not mean constantly making new friends or getting to know a lot of people.
- ◆ A small network made up of family members and/or a few old friends can serve as good support for us.
- ◆ Keeping in touch with our family and friends will improve our social and mental well-being.



2. Community Resources

- ◆ We can consider joining interest groups, classes or courses available at our Community Club (CC) or Residents' Committee (RC) nearby.
- ◆ National Silver Academy (NSA) also offers a wide variety of learning opportunities based on our interests.

3. Hobbies and Volunteerism

- ◆ Hobbies can be simpler and less strenuous depending on our preferences, such as brisk walking, craftwork and gardening.
- ◆ All hobbies encourage the creation and maintenance of social network in our lives.
- ◆ Volunteer work is another popular avenue for us to do something meaningful and purposeful, to make a difference to others.

General Resources

Name	Website
Action Plan for Successful Ageing	https://www.moh.gov.sg/ifeelyoungsg
Active SG	https://www.myactivesg.com/
Centre for Seniors (CFS)	http://www.centreforseniors.org.sg
Community Clubs	https://www.pa.gov.sg/our-network/community-clubs
Council for Third Age (C3A)	http://www.c3a.org.sg/
Health Hub	https://www.healthhub.sg/
Health Hub Healthy Ageing	https://www.healthhub.sg/programmes/51/Healthy_Ageing
Health Promotion Board (HPB)	https://www.hpb.gov.sg/
National Library Board (NLB)	https://www.nlb.gov.sg/
National Silver Academy (NSA)	http://www.nsa.org.sg
National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC)	https://www.nvpc.org.sg/
People's Association (PA)	https://www.pa.gov.sg/
RSVP Singapore – The Organisation of Senior Volunteers	https://rsvp.org.sg/
Silver Schemes	http://www.silverschemes.sg/
SkillsFuture	http://www.skillsfuture.sg/







© Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore 2019. All rights reserved. All information correct as of October 2019. No part of this document may be reproduced, copied, reverse compiled, adapted, distributed, commercially exploited, displayed or stored in a database, retrieval system or transmitted in any form without prior permission of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. All information and material found in this document are for purposes of information only and are not meant to substitute any advice provided by your own physician or other medical professionals.