

# Physical Activity and Brain Health



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and Care Partners

In this factsheet, you will learn about:



Benefits to  
Thinking Abilities



Benefits to  
the Brain

## Key ideas:

- Research suggests that exercise may improve thinking abilities
- Exercise also changes the structure and connections of the brain for the better!



## Exercise may improve thinking abilities

- The physical benefits of exercise are well-established.
- Research suggests that exercise can improve the way we think too!
- People who are more physically active have slower decline in thinking abilities with aging and lower risk of dementia.
- People with or without dementia that take up exercise may also improve their thinking abilities. This includes:
  - Memory
  - Ability to focus your attention on important tasks
  - Problem solving

Let's talk about how changes in your brain with exercise could contribute to improvements in thinking abilities.

# Brain changes with physical activity

## Exercise increases the number of brain cells and blood vessels

- Neurons are the specialized cells of the brain.
- By looking at the brains of animals, we see that exercise increases the number of neurons and blood vessels in the brain.
- Some studies show that people who take up exercise increase the size of their brain, especially in areas responsible for memory!

## Exercise improves the way your brain functions

- Exercise also changes the connections between neurons in the brain. These connections are important to how your brain processes information and makes decisions.
- Different areas of the brain work together to make decisions and to produce movement. The connections between these brain areas are strengthened after just one year of exercising.

### My notes, reflections, and goals:

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### How can I get started?

- Both aerobic exercise (movement that makes you breathe harder and your heart beat faster) and strength training improve thinking abilities.
- What activities can you add to your routine to boost your brain benefits from exercise?

### Where can I find more information?

- See **Staying Physically Active – Alzheimer’s Society of Canada** – <https://tinyurl.com/395a2km6>