

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:



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>