

YOUR 8-PAGE
GUIDE TO

CARING for a LOVED ONE with DEMENTIA

In 2019, dementia was the leading cause of death among females, surpassing even heart disease.

Dementia impairs thoughts, communication, and memory. It interferes with the performance of everyday tasks and often leads to total dependence. Watching an elderly parent suffer and slowly die is frustrating and painful.

HEALTHY DIET

1

Diet is a controllable risk factor for dementia. Cut sugary foods and refined carbs, limit processed foods, avoid trans-fats, increase omega-3 fats, enjoy fruit and vegetables, drink 2-4 cups of tea daily, and keep alcohol to a minimum.



Poor diet is linked to inflammation, which injures neurons; being overweight doubles Alzheimer's risk. Correct diet can lower the risk of diabetes, which inhibits communication between brain cells, and healthy fats may reduce beta-amyloid plaques.

Dementia can take away your loved one's ability to shop for ingredients, prepare healthy foods safely, stay hydrated, and maintain self-control. You may need to take an increasingly active role in your parent's diet. If you can't visit, Skype (which we recommend for reliable video-calling) is a great way to check what they eat and ensure they drink enough water.



REDUCE BLOOD PRESSURE

2

Health professionals recommend to test blood pressure every 1-2 years or more often if there are risk factors or medication changes.



High blood pressure can damage and narrow brain blood vessels, increasing the risk of blocked or burst blood vessels, leading to cell death. Known as vascular dementia, this affects memory, thinking, and language skills. Hypertension is also associated with tangles of tau protein, a hallmark of Alzheimer's Disease.

Medication can help reduce blood pressure easily. However, dementia patients often forget to take their tablets.

Pharmacies can home-deliver medication in "blister packs". Talking alarms and smart pill dispensers help some, but dementia patients are notorious for ignoring reminders. Skype is ideal for encouraging and watching your parent take medication and to guide the correct use of a home blood-pressure machine.

Ultimately, a visiting nurse may be required to ensure compliance.



EXERCISE

3

Health professionals recommend 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise a week, combining cardio with strength training.

Physical activity stimulates the brain's ability to maintain old connections and to form new ones. Strength/balance training has the added benefit of reducing the risk of falls.



Seniors have fewer visitors to encourage physical exertion, fewer interests that require movement, and a greater risk of falling. Moreover, dementia destroys the motivation to exercise.

You can organise regular walks, such as shopping trips. The local gym, seniors club, seniors day centre or aged care facility may run classes specifically for the elderly. Gardening should be encouraged as long as there is sufficient mobility.

In a 2016 medical study¹, seniors showed improved health in just 12 weeks of instructor-led tele-exercise over Skype. In the US, Virtual Seniors Centers now offer tai-chi and exercise classes. If your parent is house-bound, family members can take turns to lead "Gran" through some simple home exercises.

Talk to the GP for advice on the right level and forms of exercise, and ideas on local social exercise activities for seniors.

¹ Hong et al "Effects of home-based tele-exercise on ... elderly adults: Body composition and functional fitness" J Exp Gerontol 2017

MANAGE DEPRESSION

4

It can be difficult for the family to notice gradual changes in mood and personality. Dementia patients may be suffering inwardly but unable to properly verbalise. Surveys have shown that 50% of those in aged care have at least one symptom of depression.

Depression episodes have an actual physical effect on the brain. Depressed older adults are 65% more likely to develop Alzheimer's and more than twice as likely to develop vascular dementia.



Manage an existing depression condition by taking your elderly parent to a mental health professional regularly, and ensuring that prescribed medication is never missed.

Social isolation and loneliness are linked to depression. Recent OHSU studies² show that only face-to-face conversation – specifically with family and friends, **at least three times** a week – can halve depression risk. The most recent study³ showed the same benefits of regular contact via Skype! Video calling is an excellent way to increase face-to-face contact, especially for those who do not see family and friends daily.

² Teo et al “[Does Mode of Contact with Different Types of Social Relationships Predict Depression in Older Adults?](#)” J Am Geriatrics Soc 2015

³ OHSU News “[Using Skype to beat the blues](#)” Nov 2018

MENTAL STIMULATION VIA SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

5

Keeping the brain active is thought to build reserves of healthy brain cells and connections between them, and new research suggests that social engagement may be the best form of mental stimulation.

A Global Council of Brain Health report⁴ and a 2018 medical study⁵ concluded that brain-training games, sudoku, and crossword puzzles do not help protect the mind from dementia:

*“Brain-training games have little benefit for brain health and memory, and people should concentrate on **socialising**”*

Verbal communication exercises memory, linguistic skills, attention, executive function, and abstract reasoning.

Face-to-face conversation significantly adds to this. It exercises visual processing, pattern recognition, interpretation of facial and body language that convey meaning and emotion, and the coordinated use of gestures which are linked to psychomotor skills.

An OHSU study⁶ shows that increased social interaction via **face-to-face calls** could be a promising intervention for improving cognitive function. Study participants had **measurably** improved brain function **after just six weeks** of daily video calling.

⁴ [“Crosswords and Sudoku are not the solution to dementia”](#) as reported in The Telegraph 2017

⁵ Staff R et al [“Intellectual engagement and cognitive ability in later life”](#) British Medical Journal 2018

⁶ Hodge et al [“Web-enabled conversational interactions as a method to improve cognitive functions: Results of a 6-week randomized controlled trial”](#)



KEY TAKEAWAY – SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IS VITAL!

6

Face-to-face conversation with family & friends – both in-person and via video calling – can make a real and measurable difference. It hits every recommendation in this guide:

- **Depression** episodes are more likely to be noticed
- **Blood pressure** medication compliance can be monitored
- Family are likely to encourage exercise and a **healthy diet**
- Face-to-face communication exercises the **brain**, and preparation requires **physical activity** such as grooming.

Face-to-face social engagement is vital for those at risk of dementia or suffering from dementia.



Help your parent prolong their independence, avoid social isolation and mitigate the risks of depression and dementia; find out if a video phone is the right thing for your loved one, or maybe an iPad or seniors mobile would suit you best!

[Click here to book
your free 15-minute elder care assessment](#)

Remember, every dementia case is different, and our senior experts at Konnekt have experience supporting hundreds of patients, carers and families.

Our mission is to minimize the development and impact of dementia, and save you hours of research. During our **free 15-minute consultation** we will help you:

- Understand available **communication aids** that help with dementia, hearing loss, physical and mental impairments
- Pick the right **assistive technologies** for your parent
- Tap into **government funding**

Konnekt exists to ease the suffering of families, by supplying the world's easiest-to-use video phone, to meet the challenges of ageing, hearing, mobility and mentally impaired individuals.

[Click here to book
your free 15-minute elder care assessment](#)



Find out more about Konnekt's Videophone for dementia patients
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