

MEMORY MOMENT

Many people often ask us "Is there any way to prevent dementia?" While there is a lot we still don't know about these diseases, research is developing ways to reduce the risk of dementia as well as many other chronic diseases. Over the next several months, this article series will focus on various strategies for better health. This month, we focus on exercise.

EXERCISE TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF AZHEIMER'S DISEASE

By Shannon Nosbisch, CDP, DCS

- **New studies are adding to a growing body of evidence that regular exercise can reduce Alzheimer's symptoms.**
- **One study reported that people over the age of 60 who do at least 30 minutes of exercise five days a week have fewer biomarkers associated with Alzheimer's.**
- **A second study found that people with a genetic high risk of Alzheimer's who exercised regularly had fewer biomarkers.**
- **A third study reported a biomarker known as "white matter hyperintensities" increased more slowly in people who are physically active. (Healthline.com)**

These are just a few of the research outcomes that are emerging about exercise and the risk for dementia, especially Alzheimer's Disease. Several studies are showing that exercise, especially aerobic exercise, keeps your memory sharp and lowers your risk for dementia. Since

there are no new treatments for Alzheimer's disease that have been developed, reducing your risk is very important.

Researchers have linked exercise to better blood flow to the brain and possibly countering natural reduction in brain connections that occurs with aging. Studies have also shown that aerobic exercise stimulates the release of growth hormones that may also improve brain function. Messages are more efficiently relayed between brain cells in older adults who exercise, compared to those that lead a sedentary lifestyle.

In people who already have Alzheimer's disease, exercise may be a treatment option, even in late stages. This may be due to a decrease in neurofibrillary tangles and amyloid deposits or because exercise causes an increase in blood flow, brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), insulin-like growth factor 1, hormones and second messengers.

Many researchers and health care providers believe "What's good for the heart is good for the brain." However, stronger scientific evidence is needed to prove it and that is why the Risk Reduction for Alzheimer's (rrAD) trial is being conducted. The Risk Reduction for Alzheimer's Disease (rrAD) trial is a five-year study testing several strategies that could reduce Alzheimer's risk in people at risk of this disease. Six medical schools around the country are involved with this study, whose aim is to determine whether specific exercise routines – paired with medications to lower blood pressure and cholesterol - can reduce the risk of dementia. (rrAD.org)

Research also has found that it is never too late to exercise to prevent dementia or delay the onset. The activity must be enough to raise the heart rate.

According to the Mayo Clinic exercising five times a week for 30 minutes may:

- Keep thinking, reasoning and learning skills sharp for healthy individuals
- Improve memory, reasoning, judgment and thinking skills (cognitive function) for people with mild Alzheimer's disease or mild cognitive impairment
- Delay the start of Alzheimer's for people at risk of developing the disease or slow the progress of the disease.

More research is needed to know to what degree adding physical activity improves memory or slows the progression of cognitive decline. Nonetheless, regular exercise is important to stay healthy and well, physically, mentally, and beyond.

Helpguide.org offers the following suggestions for starting an exercise routine, even if you don't like to exercise:

- Listen to music or an audiobook while lifting weights.
- Window shop while walking laps at the mall.
- Get competitive while playing tennis.
- Take photographs on a nature hike.
- Meet new people at a yoga class or fitness center.
- Watch a favorite movie or TV show while walking on the treadmill.
- Instead of chatting with a friend over coffee, chat while walking, stretching, or strength training.
- Walk the golf course instead of using a cart.
- Walk or play fetch with a dog. If you don't own a dog, offer to take a neighbor's dog for a walk or volunteer at a pet shelter or rescue group.

- Go for a run, walk, or cycle when you're feeling stressed—see how much better you feel afterwards.
- Find an exercise buddy, someone whose company you really enjoy, and try activities you've never tried before—you may find something you love. At worst, you've spent time with a good friend.

Hopefully, knowing how important aerobic exercise is, you can get started today!

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.