

# **PREVENTING DEMENTIA IN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES BY AGING WELL**

Advice from older Indigenous peoples



Older Indigenous adults, people diagnosed with dementia, caregivers, knowledge keepers and health care providers shared their experience for healthy brain aging. This factsheet combines a summary of their advice and with advice from Alzheimer's societies.

## Healthy Body – Healthy Mind

### “You gotta keep active”

Adults who are physically active through sports, regular exercise, walking and outdoor activities are at a lower risk for dementia.

Some ways to keep your mind healthy as you age are to:

- Take care of your heart
- Use and challenge your mind
- Keep your body active - moving regularly
- Maintain good relationships with family and friends - visiting
- Eat good healthy foods

### SOME EXAMPLES:

Many older Indigenous adults kept their minds and bodies active by reading, working on puzzles, crafting, listening to or playing music, gardening, hunting and fishing, as well as walking in the bush or around town and going for bicycle rides. They warned about watching too much television or being lonely.

Indigenous people also talked about participating in ceremonies, church and community events as good opportunities to keep active, get out in the community and visit with others.



## Take care of your body

Healthy aging means treating your body well. This includes maintaining good personal hygiene, getting enough sleep and eating healthy foods, including lots of vegetables and fruits. Some people feel that foods from their own gardens or from the land are best for your health. Try to stay away from processed foods and soft drinks.

We need to be careful what we put into our bodies. For our brains to stay healthy, we need to limit how much alcohol we drink and be careful with prescription drugs. If you have questions about your prescriptions or need help with alcohol or drug dependency, you need to talk to a health care worker or someone you trust to help.

Some people talked about the importance of ceremonies to help keep their mind, body and spirit in balance. Try to take time each day to care for you physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs.





## Stay connected

### To nature and community

Maintaining strong and positive relationships with your communities and family can have positive impacts on healthy brain aging.

Older Indigenous adults talked about the importance of visiting with their families, friends and other community members to prevent loneliness. Find opportunities in your community that honours Elders' roles to help you stay connected.

#### SOME EXAMPLES:

Passing on knowledge to younger generations through storytelling, songs, prayer and ceremony; sharing teachings about health and balance; teaching the language, and more.

Being involved in community activities and networking with community groups, as well as seniors or Elders groups helps older Indigenous adults to maintain a sense of purpose and connections with culture.

Spiritual connections whether through ceremony, church, or time out on the land – it is up to you to decide what is right for you and how you want to do it.

### Across generations

Memory care and brain health is a life long journey that involves the whole community, especially younger generations. For example, playing with kids and youth can keep older Indigenous adults active. Older adults have a role in teaching youth how to age and grow in a healthy way.

Share stories, songs and teachings in the language with kids and youth. Many older adults and caregivers we spoke with shared that they enjoyed speaking the language with their loved ones.



## Take the time you need to heal

A big part of aging in a healthy way is taking care of your feelings. Some people have sad or painful stories in their family histories, which are sometimes used as a source of strength and resilience. Healing from these stories is a lifelong journey and it is not easy, but it could help you stay healthier as you get older.

Take the time to care for yourself if you have other illnesses such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

*“I think it’s interesting to think about the way you live your life and the way that even from childhood things happen to you, what you eat, what you do, your experiences and if that might have any impact on your memory down the road” (said one person with dementia from Manitoulin Island).*



## Learning to age well across the life course: ideas for...

### Kids

- Ask older loved ones to teach you words in the language
- Play outside
- Learn a musical instrument or sport
- Ask grown-ups in your life to tell you what being spiritual means to them
- Teach the grown-ups in your life something you learned at school
- Ask your older loved ones what it was like when they were young
- Help older loved ones look up a healthy recipe online and learn to make it together
- Learn to craft something with the grown-ups in your life

### Youth

- Make a memory box with older loved ones in your life
- Learn to craft something with grown-ups in your life
- Plan a games night with older loved ones
- Interview an older adult about their life story and make a video
- Honour the older adults in your community by offering support
- Ask older loved ones to teach you their favourite recipes
- Do puzzles or play games with older adults in your community

## Adults

- Find the humour in everyday life
- Eat dinner as a family
- Practice or learn your Nation's original language
- Even grown-ups need to have fun – remember to play
- Talk to children and youth about your childhood
- Pass on skills to kids and youth, like hunting, fishing or crafting
- Care for your mind, body, spirit
- Make the time to play sports or practice hobbies that you enjoy
- Develop a good relationship with a doctor that you trust
- Seek out healing for any trauma you carry with you

## Older Adults

- Practice hobbies that you enjoy
- Spend time with other people, especially kids and youth
- Connect with other older adults in your community and have fun
- Develop a good relationship with a doctor that you trust and visit them regularly
- Speak in your first language whenever you can
- Pass on skills and stories to the younger people
- Spend time outside
- Walk if you are able
- Do puzzles or play games to keep your mind sharp
- If you become lonely or depressed let someone know



## For more information...

Indigenous Inuit Home and  
Community Care

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

Alzheimer's Society of Canada

[www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)

Indigenous Cognition & Aging Awareness  
Research Exchange (I-CAARE)

[www.i-caare.ca](http://www.i-caare.ca)

Government of Canada

[www.seniors.gc.ca](http://www.seniors.gc.ca)

End-of-Life Care in Indigenous  
Communities

<http://eolfn.lakeheadu.ca/>

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