



ACTIVE

DEMENTIA ACTION WEEK

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DEMENTIA ACTION WEEK 2026: MOVING FOR BRAIN HEALTH

Dementia Action Week, 21-27 September 2026, is an opportunity to increase awareness, challenge misconceptions, and encourage conversations about dementia. Dementia affects memory, thinking, behaviour, and the ability to perform everyday activities. While age is the greatest risk factor, dementia is not a normal part of ageing, and there are steps individuals can take to support brain health throughout life (Dementia Australia, 2026; World Health Organization [WHO], 2026).

The Connection Between Exercise and Brain Health

Regular physical activity plays an important role in maintaining brain health. Exercise supports cardiovascular function, increases blood flow to the brain, promotes healthy sleep, and helps manage conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, all of which are associated with cognitive decline and dementia risk (WHO, 2026; Livingston et al., 2020).

Research indicates that physical inactivity is a modifiable risk factor for dementia. The World Health Organization estimates that up to 45% of dementia risk may be linked to factors that can be modified throughout life, including physical inactivity, social isolation, and chronic health conditions (WHO, 2026).

COMMON MYTHS



Myth 1: Dementia is a normal part of ageing.

- Dementia is not a normal part of ageing. It is caused by diseases affecting the brain and can significantly impact a person's ability to function independently (Dementia Australia, 2026).

Myth 2: Nothing can be done to reduce dementia risk.

- Although there is currently no cure for dementia, evidence suggests that addressing lifestyle and health-related risk factors may help reduce or delay the onset of cognitive decline (Livingston et al., 2020; WHO, 2026).

Myth 3: People living with dementia should avoid exercise.

- Exercise remains safe and beneficial for many people living with dementia when appropriately prescribed and supervised. Physical activity can support mobility, independence, and overall wellbeing (Yu et al., 2021).

EXERCISE AND LIVING WELL WITH DEMENTIA

For people living with dementia, regular exercise can provide benefits that extend beyond physical health. Research has shown that physical activity may help maintain strength, balance, mobility, functional capacity, and independence while also supporting mood and quality of life (Yu et al., 2021).

Exercise can also reduce falls risk, improve confidence in daily activities, and create opportunities for meaningful social engagement through group classes, walking groups, or community programs (Yu et al., 2021; WHO, 2026).

EVERY MOVE COUNTS

Supporting brain health does not require intense or complicated exercise programs. Small amounts of regular movement accumulated over time can make a meaningful difference. Walking more often, breaking up periods of prolonged sitting, participating in recreational activities, and choosing active transport are all ways to increase daily physical activity.

The latest WHO guidelines emphasise that regular physical activity throughout life is one of the key strategies for supporting cognitive health and reducing dementia risk (WHO, 2026).



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EXERCISE RECOMMENDATIONS

Current physical activity guidelines for older adults recommend aiming for:

- **150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week**, or 75-150 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity.
- **Muscle-strengthening activities at least twice per week.**
- **Balance and functional exercises at least three times per week** for older adults to help reduce falls risk.
- **Reducing prolonged periods of sitting** by incorporating movement throughout the day.

Examples include walking, resistance training, swimming, cycling, gardening, dancing, tai chi, and structured exercise programs (WHO, 2026; Northey et al., 2018).

FINAL THOUGHTS

While dementia remains one of the greatest health challenges facing Australians, there is growing evidence that healthy lifestyle behaviours can support brain health across the lifespan. Regular physical activity is one of the most accessible and evidence-based strategies available to promote cognitive health, maintain independence, and improve quality of life for people living with dementia and those looking to reduce their risk (Livingston et al., 2020; WHO, 2026).



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RESOURCES

Dementia Australia. (2026). Dementia Action Week. <https://www.dementia.org.au/get-involved/dementia-action-week>

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