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[A gateway to the strategies, policies, programs and services delivered by the Department of Health & Human Services.](#)



-

[Seniors Online](#)

[Victorian government portal for older people, with information about government and community services and programs.](#)

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Healthy mind and older people

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- [Aged care services](#)

Summary

- Keeping physically fit, eating a healthy diet and doing regular mental exercises may help maintain your brain's functions, including memory.
- Prescription medications or disease can contribute to a marked decline in mental abilities.
- A brain that gets smaller and lighter with age can still function as effectively as a younger brain.
- Memory loss may be improved by doing mental exercises. Reading newspapers, magazines and books; playing 'thinking' games like Scrabble, cards and Trivial Pursuit; doing crossword puzzles and word games; studying a topic that interests you; learning a language; or learning something you've never learnt before may all help exercise your brain.
- Conditions and events more common to older age that affect brain function include atherosclerosis (narrowed arteries), dementia (such as Alzheimer's disease), Parkinson's disease and stroke.

Growing older does not mean that you will automatically lose your memory or other thinking skills. There's a lot you can do to keep your mind healthy. Regular physical activity, a healthy diet and mental exercises may help keep your brain and memory working.

Prescription medications or disease can contribute to a marked decline in mental abilities. Older people are more likely to take medications for chronic conditions than younger people. In some cases, a drug (or a combination of drugs) can affect your mental abilities.

Certain diseases that are more common with ageing, such as Alzheimer's disease, can also be the underlying cause of loss of brain function. Check with your doctor to make sure cognitive changes, such as memory loss, are not a side effect of medication or associated with an infection or illness.

Brain changes with ageing

Normal changes to the brain that happen as a person gets older include:

- fat and other deposits building up inside brain cells (neurons), which limits their functioning
- neurons that die from 'old age' not being replaced
- loss of neurons meaning the brain gets smaller with age
- messages between neurons being sent at a slower speed.

A brain that gets smaller and lighter with age can still function just as well as a younger brain. For example, exercising an older brain can create new connections between neurons. Mental abilities may be 'shared' by various parts of the brain so as some neurons die, their roles are taken up by others.

Physical activity is important for a healthy mind

Some conditions that can affect the brain's ability to function, such as stroke, are associated with diet, obesity and sedentary lifestyle choices. Keeping an active body is crucial if you want an active mind.

Regular exercise may improve your brain's memory, reasoning abilities and reaction times.

Some things that may help include:

- Getting at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise every day gives your brain an oxygen boost. This means increasing your heart rate to a level where you can talk but not sing. You don't have to do your 30 minutes of exercise all at once, as exercising in three 10-minute blocks, gives significant health benefits.
- Avoiding smoking and drinking too much alcohol.

Eat healthy food for a healthy mind

Good nutrition helps keep your brain in good condition. Some tips for eating well include :

- Make sure your diet contains sufficient nutrition and vitamins.
- Eat a balanced diet and avoid extreme low- carbohydrate diets, as glucose is the brain's only energy source.
- Eat more vegetables and some fruit
- Eat less processed food, especially foods that have a lot of saturated fat (like biscuits, pastries, fast foods), salty foods and drinks, and foods high in sugar.
- Drink enough water for your body size and lifestyle.

Improve your mental fitness

Memory loss can be improved by 30 to 50 per cent simply by doing mental exercises. The brain is like a muscle – if you do not give it regular workouts, it will get weaker.

You may want to try the following:

- Have a social life and engage in plenty of stimulating conversations.
- Read newspapers, magazines and books.
- Play 'thinking' games like Scrabble, cards and Trivial Pursuit.
- Take a course on a subject that interests you.
- Take up a new hobby.
- Learn a language or a dance.
- Do crossword puzzles and word games.
- Play games that challenge the intellect and memory, such as chess.
- Watch 'question and answer' game shows on television, and play along with the contestants.
- Try hobbies such as woodwork, as they can improve the brain's spatial awareness (knowing the location of things in relation to your own body).

Keep stress under control with regular meditation, exercise and relaxation – an excess of stress hormones like cortisol can be harmful to neurons.

You can also keep your memory sharp, by getting regular and adequate sleep.

Boost your memory

Being good at remembering something is a learned skill. Some ways you can improve your memory, no matter what your age, include:

- paying attention to whatever it is you want to remember. For example, if you are busy thinking about something else, you may not notice where you put the house keys.
- using memory triggers such as association or visualisation techniques. For example, link a name you want to remember with a mental picture.
- practising using your memory. For example, try to remember short lists, such as a grocery list. Use memory triggers to help you 'jump' from one item to the next. One type of memory trigger is a walking route that you know well. Mentally attach each item on your list to a landmark along the way. For example, imagine putting the bread at the letterbox, the apples at the next-door neighbour's house and the vegetables at the bus stop. To remember the list, you just have to 'walk' the route in your mind.

How your health affects your brain function

Getting older does not necessarily mean that the brain stops working as well as it once did. However, some conditions more common in older age that affect brain function include:

- atherosclerosis
- dehydration
- dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease
- depression
- diabetes mellitus
- heart disease
- medications – prescribed medicines should be regularly reviewed so that unwanted side effects are avoided, and drugs should be discontinued if they are no longer required
- poor nutrition and vitamin deficiency
- Parkinson's disease
- stroke.

You might be able to manage the things that affect your brain function by:

- being physically active
- eating healthy food and drinking water
- monitoring conditions such as hypertension, cholesterol and diabetes
- managing your medications.

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- [Geriatrician](#)
- [Neurologist](#)
- [Alzheimer's Australia Vic](#), call 1800 100 500
- [Carers Victoria](#), call 1800 242 636
- [Council on the Ageing Victoria](#), call (03) 9654 4443

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More information

Aged care services topics

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- [Aged care services explained](#)
- [Aged care options and settings](#)
- [Assessing your needs and planning for the future](#)
- [Help with living at home](#)
- [Aged care residential homes](#)

- [Managing your health and healthcare](#)
- [Aged care rights and representation](#)
- [Support for carers](#)

Aged care services explained

- [Changing needs and aged care](#)

[There is a wide range of aged care services available to help meet the health and care needs of older people, including home support services, residential care and services for people leaving hospital...](#)

- [Who's who in aged care](#)

[Aged care services are provided by a range of skilled and experienced professionals and aged care support staff...](#)

- [About aged care services \(video\)](#)

[A broad range of services is available to support your health and wellbeing as you age...](#)

- [Disability and aged care](#)

[For older people living with a disability, it can be hard to manage household chores and day-to-day tasks without support. Here are some support services that can help...](#)

- [Transition care after hospital](#)

[The Transition Care Program provides care through tailored support packages, while the Home and Community Care \(HACC\) Program provides a range of basic maintenance and support services...](#)

- [What to do after someone dies](#)

[When someone dies, it will help you to have a written plan of what you need to do including who you need to contact...](#)

Aged care options and settings

- [Advance care plan - personal stories](#)

[Advance care plan personal stories...](#)

- [Changing needs and aged care](#)

[There is a wide range of aged care services available to help meet the health and care needs of older people, including home support services, residential care and services for people leaving hospital...](#)

- [Palliative care - personal stories](#)

[Palliative care - personal stories...](#)

- [Residential aged care homes](#)

[Residential aged care homes provide safe and comfortable accommodation as well as ongoing healthcare, support and social interaction that can adapt to your changing needs...](#)

- [Respite supports and services for people with a disability](#)

[Respite supports and services aim to support people with a disability, their families and carers, to maintain positive family and carer relationships, by giving carers a break from their regular role...](#)

- [Retirement villages](#)

[Retirement villages provide independent accommodation for retirees \(over the age of 55\) and often include extra facilities and services such as swimming pools, libraries, tennis courts, meeting rooms...](#)

- [Transition care after hospital](#)

[The Transition Care Program provides care through tailored support packages, while the Home and Community Care \(HACC\) Program provides a range of basic maintenance and support services...](#)

- [What to do after someone dies](#)

[When someone dies, it will help you to have a written plan of what you need to do including who you need to contact...](#)

Assessing your needs and planning for the future

- [Planning for future aged care needs](#)

[If you are getting older or looking after someone who is elderly, you may be thinking about getting home help, getting your legal and financial affairs in order or applying for aged care homes \(also...](#)

- [Medical treatment decision makers](#)

[You can appoint someone to be your medical power of attorney, also known as 'enduring power of attorney \(medical treatment\)', to make medical decisions on your behalf when, in certain circumstances...](#)

- [Making plans and decisions for the end of your life](#)

[Planning and making decisions about the end of your life can be a positive experience. It is a good opportunity to reflect on the things that are important to you, and to make arrangements that suit...](#)

- [Retirement villages](#)

[Retirement villages provide independent accommodation for retirees \(over the age of 55\) and often include extra facilities and services such as swimming pools, libraries, tennis courts, meeting rooms...](#)

- [Advance care plan - personal stories](#)

[Advance care plan personal stories...](#)

- [End of life and palliative care for children, teenagers and young adults](#)

[There are age sensitive palliative care services that will help you and your family...](#)

- [Palliative care for culturally and linguistically diverse communities](#)

[There are culturally sensitive palliative care services that will help you and your family...](#)

- [Palliative care for the LGBTI community](#)

[There are end of life and palliative care services that provide safe, inclusive care for people who identify as LGBTI...](#)

- [Palliative care - personal stories](#)

[Palliative care - personal stories...](#)

- [Palliative care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#)

[There are culturally sensitive palliative care services that will help you and your family...](#)

Help with living at home

- [Healthcare and support at home](#)

[Home care services are available for people recovering from illness or surgery, frail older people, the elderly and people with disabilities...](#)

- [Living at home as you get older](#)

[As you get older, living at home can be made easier by using home care services, setting a routine and keeping socially active...](#)

- [End of life and palliative care at home](#)

[Some people prefer having palliative care at home because of the familiar environment, feeling of independence and close access to family, friends and the local community...](#)

- [Home and Community Care Program for Younger People \(HACC PYP\)](#)

[The Home and Community Care Program for Younger People provides services to support younger people with disabilities, and their carers. These services help people live as independently as possible in...](#)

- [Advance care plan - personal stories](#)

[Advance care plan personal stories...](#)

- [Aids and equipment at home](#)

[Disability aids and equipment such as wheelchairs, walking frames and braces can help people with disabilities and the elderly gain more independence...](#)

- [At the end – dying explained](#)

[Some people prefer having palliative care at home because of the familiar environment, feeling of independence and close access to family, friends and the local community...](#)

- [End of life and palliative care volunteers](#)

[Some people prefer having palliative care at home because of the familiar environment, feeling of independence and close access to family, friends and the local community...](#)

- [Maintaining your quality of life during a life-limiting illness](#)

[End of life and palliative care is based on person-centred and holistic care. Talk with your family, close friends, doctor and your palliative care team about what they can do to help you to make the...](#)

- [Palliative care – dealing with common symptoms](#)

[Some people prefer having palliative care at home because of the familiar environment, feeling of independence and close access to family, friends and the local community...](#)

Aged care residential homes

- [Residential aged care homes](#)

[Residential aged care homes provide safe and comfortable accommodation as well as ongoing healthcare, support and social interaction that can adapt to your changing needs...](#)

- [Residential aged care home costs](#)

[The Australian Government Department of Health will assess your income and assets to work out how much financial help you will get for a place in a residential aged care home...](#)

- [Living in a residential aged care home](#)

[Residential aged care homes provide a range of care, services, social, cultural and spiritual activities, and different physical environments which give you options for how to spend your days...](#)

- [Living in a residential aged care home](#)

[Residential aged care homes provide a range of care, services, social, cultural and spiritual activities, and different physical environments which give you options for how to spend your days...](#)

Managing your health and healthcare

- [Healthy mind and older people](#)

[Physical activity, a healthy diet and mental exercises may help maintain your brain's functions, including memory...](#)

- [Managing appointments, treatments and medications as a carer](#)

[Carers often organise appointments and treatments for the person they are caring for and help with medicines...](#)

- [Services to support people with dementia and their carers](#)

[Services are available in Victoria for people with dementia, and their partners, carers and friends...](#)

- [Aids and equipment at home](#)

[Disability aids and equipment such as wheelchairs, walking frames and braces can help people with disabilities and the elderly gain more independence...](#)

- [Advance care plan - personal stories](#)

[Advance care plan personal stories...](#)

- [Dealing with grief and loss](#)

[Grief counselling and bereavement services can help you with feelings of grief and loss caused by death, loss of control and independence due to ageing...](#)

- [Falls – services for older people](#)

[Falls are a major cause of injury for older people. There are many services available to help prevent or recover from a fall...](#)

- [Older people in hospital – Get well soon](#)

[Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay...](#)

- [Palliative care - personal stories](#)

[Palliative care - personal stories...](#)

- [Second opinions](#)

[You have the right to ask a doctor for a second opinion if you are unsure about your doctor's suggested medical treatment or a diagnosis...](#)

Aged care rights and representation

- [Health Complaints Commissioner](#)

[The Health Complaints Commissioner \(HCC\) resolves complaints about healthcare and the handling of health information in Victoria. It can also investigate providers who pose a serious danger to the...](#)

- [Making a complaint about disability services](#)

[If you are unhappy with the way a disability service has treated you, you have the right to complain and to have your concerns addressed...](#)

- [Making a complaint about a mental health service](#)

[If you are dissatisfied with a mental health treatment or service, you have the right to make a complaint and have your concerns addressed...](#)

- [Aged care rights](#)

[Whether you are receiving care at home or living in a residential aged care home, you have the right to be treated with respect and dignity at all times, and receive high-quality care and support...](#)

Support for carers

- [Financial support for carers](#)

[The Australian and Victorian Governments offer a number of carer support services to people who provide care to someone with a disability or mental illness, with a medical condition, after an illness...](#)

- [Looking after yourself as a carer](#)

[If you are a carer, for example of a person with a disability or mental illness, or recovering from an accident or illness or an older person with care needs, you need to look after yourself or the...](#)

- [Emotional support services for carers](#)

[Look after your emotional needs so you can continue your care role, be healthy and well and enjoy life as much as possible...](#)

- [Emergency or crisis support for carers](#)

[An emergency care plan is a set of instructions about caring for someone in the event that you are not able to...](#)

Related Information

- [Dementia](#)

Early signs, types, management and coping...

- [Services to support people with dementia and their carers](#)

Services are available in Victoria for people with dementia, and their partners, carers and friends...

- [Dealing with grief and loss](#)

Grief counselling and bereavement services can help you with feelings of grief and loss caused by death, loss of control and independence due to ageing...

- [Falls – services for older people](#)

Falls are a major cause of injury for older people. There are many services available to help prevent or recover from a fall...

- [Healthy and active ageing](#)

Being physically active, eating well, socialising and improving your health can help you live a healthy, happy and active life as you get older...

[Home](#)

Related information on other websites

- [About dementia – Alzheimer’s Australia](#)
- [Brain Foundation](#)

Brain Foundation website.

- [Dementia – My Aged Care](#)
- [Health Ageing Online Network](#)

Healthy Ageing Network

- [Memory changes – Alzheimer’s Australia](#)

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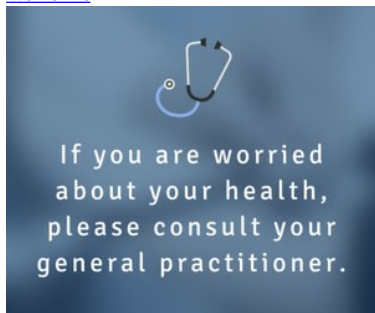
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Well for life - A healthy approach to ageing

The Department of Health and Human Services - Well for life - A healthy approach to ageing booklet (pdf)

[Well for life](#)



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[General practitioner \(GP\) services](#)

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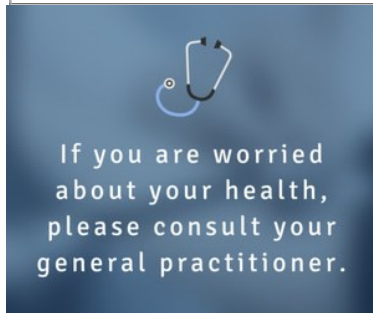
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