

THE FRYING PAN IN THE FREEZER

AVOIDING DEMENTIA

In the movie *Away from Her*, Fiona stores a frying pan in the freezer, forgets the word for wine and wears a yellow sweater (she's always hated the color). "I seem to be disappearing bit by bit," she laments as Alzheimer's – a form of dementia – slowly robs her of her mental skills and memory.

By age 85, about 35 out of 100 people have dementia.¹ But evidence suggests that exercising your mind and body may help reduce the risk of declining brain function.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Most of us know about the physical benefits of exercise – from burning calories to preventing high blood pressure. But researchers are finding that physical exercise may also reduce your risk of dementia. For example, exercise stimulates neural connections in the part of the hippocampus responsible for age-related memory decline.² Exercising can also help you stay at a healthy weight, which lowers your risk for diabetes – a risk factor for dementia.³

Experts recommend a combination of stretching, aerobic and muscle-strengthening routines. (Before you start or resume an exercise program, remember to consult your doctor.) On a budget? Consider the following alternatives to a gym membership: rent a fitness DVD from the library, buy a jump rope or weights, walk in a hilly area, check out your local community center's exercise classes, work in the garden or join a local sports team.

FLEX YOUR MENTAL MUSCLE

Activities such as board games and cards, playing an instrument, writing, socializing and doing crossword puzzles are not only fun, they can also boost mental function. In fact, a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that doing one activity just once a week is linked to a seven percent reduced risk of dementia, including Alzheimer's. Doing more activities more frequently may lower risk by as much as 63 percent.⁴

You can also attend lectures, learn a new language, take a different route to work, create a collage – the idea is to engage in mental tasks that are complex and novel. There are many theories on why mental exercise may help stave off dementia, but research on mice has shown that a highly stimulating environment increases the production of new brain and nerve cells and the density of blood vessels around them.⁵ With its anti-aging benefits, exercise – both mental and physical – may be the closest thing to the fountain of youth.

Need help?

Call toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

(800) XXX-XXXX

TDD: (800) 327-0801

or visit us at: members.mhn.com

access code: **XXXXX**

¹ WebMD. 2007. *Dementia – Topic Overview*. <http://www.webmd.com/alzheimers/tc/dementia-topic-overview> (accessed January 13, 2009).

² Meyers, Laurie. 2008. *Warding Off Dementia*. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2008/03/dementia.html> (accessed January 13, 2009).

³ WebMD. 2007. *Dementia – Prevention*. <http://www.webmd.com/alzheimers/tc/dementia-prevention> (accessed January 13, 2009).

⁴ Scott, Phil. 2008. *Staying Sharp*. http://www.aarp.org/aarp/live_and_learn/Learning/articles/staying-sharp-brain-workouts.html (accessed January 13, 2009).

⁵ Williams, Daniel. 2006. *Boosting Brain Fitness*. *Time*. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1159337,00.html?iid=digg_share (accessed January 13, 2009).

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.