



LIVING WELL

A Guide for Persons with Mild Cognitive
Impairment (MCI) & Early Dementia

In Partnership with:



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Foreword

You are probably reading this workbook because you have a diagnosis of MCI or early dementia.

My name is Ron, and I have been in your shoes.

I have always been a “Can Do” person with strong confidence and ability to see the details, analyze problems and overcome bumps in the road. I have won most of the battles in my life. After several years of retirement, I felt I needed to do something worthwhile for others and provide more stimulus and satisfaction for myself. Since I had been a high school teacher, I decided to substitute teach at a large high school. I was teaching biology, physics, and other courses, and was really enjoying the experience with the teenagers.

As the months went by, the “Can Do” person was starting to crumble day by day. I was experiencing memory problems, having trouble saying what I wanted to, and was feeling anxious, nervous, hesitant and indecisive. I felt dread when I thought about the next classroom assignment.

I realized I needed to quit teaching and get help from a neurologist. I was evaluated and got a diagnosis of Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). In looking for help to deal with this terrifying diagnosis, my wife and I attended an Alzheimer’s Association educational

support program for people with MCI and early dementia and their partners. We also attended the Alzheimer’s Association and Mayo Clinic Meeting of the Minds conference. These two programs clarified for me that my life would now be different, but not over.

My “Can Do” attitude kicked back in and I began to see this diagnosis as one more challenge. I decided to fight back and give back. To give back, I entered a research study. To fight back, I added to my regular program of physical exercise and put together a large list of brain stimulating activities including healthy eating, new experiences, social contacts, mental exercises, music, memory work, journaling, reading, and spiritual time.

The old saying “use it or lose it” has some merit. Six months after my diagnosis, tests have shown that, with this plan and medication treatment, I am doing extremely well. My outlook is positive and although only time will tell if I will win this war, for now I know I am winning many battles. I hope you will too.

Sincerely,



Ron Buerkle

Living with Mild Cognitive Impairment

My outlook is positive...only time will tell if I will win this war, for now...I am winning many battles.

Ron Buerkle

Introduction

You have been diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), Alzheimer's disease, or a related dementia. You have made it through the diagnosis and you may now be wondering what is next. You may have questions such as, "What can I do to fight this disease?" or "How can I live well with MCI or Alzheimer's?"



Although there are no known treatments that can slow or reverse the damage that is happening in your brain, there are therapies that may reduce your symptoms and their impact on your daily life. The first line of defense is typically drug treatment. You may already be taking one of the FDA-approved medications for Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. These drugs improve disease symptoms for a period of time for many people who take them. However, as with most chronic illness, drugs are just one part of the big picture.

Researchers are also studying how lifestyle changes could reduce the impact of symptoms and improve daily life. This workbook presents some brain wellness strategies, such as exercise, and the evidence behind them.

There are many unknowns about these strategies and their impact on MCI and dementia, and there is no therapy, drug or otherwise, that will stop the disease. However, the brain wellness strategies presented here aim to improve overall health and well-being, and are likely to be helpful for everyone – including your friends and family members.

This workbook can be used on your own or together with a partner. Each chapter includes information about a wellness strategy, its benefits, perspectives of people living with MCI and early dementia, ideas that you can try, and a place for you to build your own living well plan.

Congratulations on taking the first step toward living your best life with MCI or dementia.

I do have Alzheimer's. I don't want anyone else to have it, but I'm not lying down to die. I'm living well with Alzheimer's.

Julie, Living with Alzheimer's disease

[1]

Get Moving

You probably already know that regular exercise is associated with many health benefits. Staying physically active can significantly lower your risk of medical problems such as high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, diabetes, obesity, cancer, anxiety, stress, and feelings of depression. But did you know that exercise is also good for the brain?

Exercise is most effective when done regularly and in combination with a brain healthy diet (chapter 3), mental stimulation (chapter 4) and social activities (chapter 8). To help make exercise a habit, find enjoyable activities that fit your lifestyle and fitness level. Doing different types of exercises will give your body a more complete workout and keep you from getting bored. Think about exercise like a prescription, something you do every day (like taking medication) to help your brain.



Research suggests that moderate physical activity can:

- Improve blood flow in the brain.
- Maximize the brain's use of oxygen.
- Help to prevent death of brain cells.
- Increase the size of brain areas responsible for memory.
- Improve memory and thinking.

Aerobic Exercise

Most of the research linking physical activity and brain health has focused on aerobic exercise. Aerobic activities are those that make you breathe harder, raise your heart rate and make your heart and blood vessels healthier. Researchers strongly recommend aerobic exercises that raise your heart rate for at least 20–30 minutes at a time, 3 to 4 times per week.

A man's health can be judged by which he takes two at a time - pills or stairs.

Joan Welsh

Examples of aerobic activity include:

- Brisk walking.
- Jogging.
- Bicycle riding (stationary or on a path).
- Swimming.
- Water aerobics.
- Aerobic exercise classes.
- Moderate use of exercise machines (treadmill, elliptical).
- Dancing.
- Tennis.
- Gardening activities (raking, pushing the lawnmower).



Building Strength & Balance

Exercise specialists recommend adding strength building, balance, or stretching exercises to your routine to reduce the risk of falls and other injuries.

Examples of these exercises include:

- Yoga.
- Tai chi.
- Lifting weights.
- Gardening (digging, lifting, carrying).
- Carrying groceries.
- Walking backward or sideways.
- Walking on your heels or toes.
- Standing on one foot with eyes closed.
- Stretching classes.

If you have been inactive, don't worry. Some activity is better than no activity. Talk to your doctor about safe ways to add exercise to your routine. It is usually best to start at a comfortable level and add a little more activity each day. You can do it!



Benefits of Exercise

- Helps your brain work better.
- Improves your mood and lowers stress.
- Keeps you looking and feeling your best.
- Helps you stay independent.
- Gives you more energy to do things with your friends and family.



Some people with memory loss say...



I exercise every day and try to meet new people.

Ken

Exercise often, even if only for 20 minutes when you can. Smile when you finish.

Jerilynn

When I exercise I function better, feel better and I am more cognizant and alert as well as engaged.

Mike

Physical exercise is important. It is lot of stimulation for my brain.

Ron

To keep the body in good health is a duty...otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear.

Buddha



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Join a gym** or find a few nice indoor and outdoor places to exercise.
- ☐ **Start a daily** walking routine.
- ☐ **Take the stairs** whenever you can.
- ☐ **Add 20 – 30 minutes** or more of your favorite aerobic exercise 3–4 days a week.
- ☐ **Add at least one** strength building, balance, or stretching exercise to your weekly routine.
- ☐ **Make it fun!** Invite friends to exercise with you.
- ☐ **Visit the Taking Charge of Your Health** website for more ideas. www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/create-healthy-lifestyle/physical-activity-fitness

I have to exercise in the morning before my brain figures out what I'm doing.

Marsha Doble

Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



[2]

Eat Healthy

The brain is one of the most active parts of the body. You need a steady stream of nutrients to keep your brain healthy. Nutrients in the food we eat fuel our brain and body. If we do not get the right fuel, our health suffers.

Unfortunately, the standard American diet lacks essential nutrients and relies heavily on processed foods that include artificial colors, additives, flavorings, and chemically altered fats and sweeteners. This diet, when combined with a sedentary lifestyle, large portion sizes, and high stress, is unhealthy for our bodies and our brains.

Many people look to over-the-counter vitamins to supplement their diet, but getting nutrients directly from natural food sources is usually best. Though there is no evidence to suggest that any one type of food will improve Alzheimer's symptoms, research suggests that the following types of foods promote general brain health.



Fish and Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Salmon, tuna, herring, and sardines are rich in omega 3 fatty acids essential for brain function. Research suggests that omega 3 fatty acids lower the risk of stroke and dementia and may play a role in enhancing memory and slowing mental decline. Studies recommend eating two servings of fish weekly.

Whole Grains

Every organ of the body is dependent upon good blood flow. This is especially true for the heart and brain. Eating whole grains can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and enhance blood flow. Whole grains, such as popcorn and whole wheat, also contribute dietary fiber and vitamin E, which add to the brain and heart healthy benefits of these foods.

All the things that we know are bad for your heart turn out to be bad for your brain.

Marilyn S. Alpert, PhD, Johns Hopkins Institutions,
from The Healthy Brain Initiative

Bright Fruits and Vegetables

Any brain healthy diet should include lots of fruits and vegetables at every meal. Because vibrant colors often mean greater amounts of vitamins and antioxidants, you should try to eat a “rainbow” of fruits and vegetables each day.

Use the list below to help you get started.

Green

dark leafy greens, spinach, avocados, broccoli, green apples, green grapes

Red

tomatoes, red peppers, berries, red apples, cherries, watermelon

Blue/Purple

blueberries, raisins, plums, purple grapes

Orange/Yellow

oranges, mangoes, apricots, cantaloupe, peaches, carrots, squash

White

cauliflowers, bananas, onions, potatoes

A Little Spice

Curcumin, an ancient East Indian herb used in curry, has certain unique properties that make it a good food for the brain. The spice, more commonly known as Turmeric, is a potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent that supports brain health.

The Mediterranean Diet

If you are looking for a way to include more foods that are healthy for your brain, consider the Mediterranean diet. Scientific research indicates that following a Mediterranean diet is associated with a decreased risk of developing MCI and moving from MCI to Alzheimer’s disease. This type of diet has also been associated with reduced cognitive decline among individuals with MCI and Alzheimer’s disease.

The Mediterranean diet is not a specific diet plan or program, but rather a collection of eating habits traditionally followed by people of the Mediterranean region of Greece, Crete, southern France, and parts of Italy.

The longer I live the less confidence I have in drugs and the greater is my confidence in the regulation and administration of diet and regimen.

John Redman Coxe, 1800

EAT HEALTHY

Foods in the Mediterranean Diet



- **Lots of fruits and vegetables** (5-13 daily).
- **Whole grain, high-fiber** breads, cereals, and rice.
- **Fish** (salmon, sardines, trout, and tuna).
- **Dairy products**, especially yogurt, Parmesan and feta cheeses (also butter and other cheeses in moderation).
- **Olive oil, flaxseed, and avocados.**
- **Lots of legumes**, especially soybeans, lentils, white beans, black beans, chick peas.
- **Nuts**, such as walnuts, almonds, pecans, brazil nuts.
- **Fresh and dried herbs.**
- **High quality vinegars**, such as balsamic.
- **Minimal saturated fat** from limited amounts of chicken and lean cuts of red meat.
- **Moderate alcohol intake** (no more than 1 drink for women or 2 for men each day).

Sample Mediterranean Diet

BREAKFAST

Whole grain bread (toasted)
Almond butter
Apple slices
Greek yogurt

LUNCH

Roasted red pepper and tomato soup
Pre-made humus, whole grain crackers and baby carrots
Yogurt spooned over cut up grapes and strawberries

MID-AFTERNOON SNACK

Dried apricots
Walnuts

DINNER

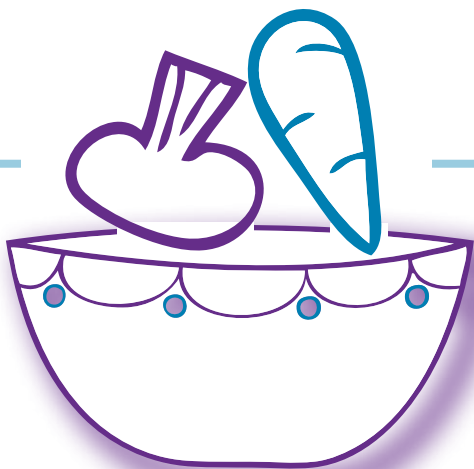
Mixed green salad with olives (green or black), cucumbers, tomatoes, and Parmesan cheese, dressed with oil and vinegar

Halibut sautéed in olive oil with lemon and thyme

Boxed couscous with added diced tomatoes, parsley, and chickpeas

Asparagus drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with pepper

EAT HEALTHY



Benefits of Eating Healthy

- Gives you more energy to do the things you want to do.
- Helps you control or avoid high blood pressure, diabetes, and other conditions.
- Keeps you looking and feeling your best.
- Adds “spice” to your life – literally!

He that takes medicine and neglects diet, wastes the skill of the physician.

Chinese Proverb

Some people with memory loss say...



I start to think about food for the week and make a plan that will give me the right food for my mind and body.

Jerilynn

My brain is clearer when I eat right.

Julie

I have been eating lots of fruits, vegetables, fish, and nuts and it has made a really big impact.

Ron



The wise man should consider
that health is the greatest of human
blessings. Let food be your medicine.

Hippocrates

EATING HEALTHY



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Go Mediterranean!** Eat at least one Mediterranean style meal each day (see sample daily menu on page 7).
- ☐ **Replace butter** and other sources of fat in your diet with extra virgin olive oil in cooking and baking.
- ☐ **Eat less sodium (salt),** trans fat, cholesterol, added sugars, and refined grains.
- ☐ **Add more fruits,** vegetables, and whole grains to your diet.
- ☐ **Watch portion size** — smaller is usually better.
- ☐ **Find a new recipe** that includes brain-healthy ingredients.
- ☐ **Limit processed foods.**
- ☐ **Make it fun!** Invite friends over to cook or eat with you.
- ☐ **Visit the Taking Charge of Your Health** website for more ideas. www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/create-healthy-lifestyle/physical-activity-fitness.

Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



[3]

Exercise Your Mind

Throughout life, brain cells, or neurons, organize themselves in response to new information and learning experiences. Connections between neurons are the building blocks of thought, memory, language and other mental activity. Keeping your mind active strengthens the connections between brain cells that you already have AND makes new connections in your brain.

MCI and Alzheimer's disease damage neurons and the connections between them. If you sprained your ankle, you might use a couple of strategies to help you manage daily tasks. First, you would probably work on slowly exercising the ankle to build strength and speed healing. Second, you would probably get some crutches to help you move around. You can do the same things for your brain. Exercising your brain through **brain workouts** builds new connections, and **memory aids**, like crutches, give you the support you need to be independent.

Brain Workouts

Many experts recommend daily brain



workouts, or mental stimulation, as part of a regular routine to stay healthy. Although the jury is still out, some studies suggest that keeping mentally active can help protect against cognitive decline. Although we need more research to fully understand the link between mental exercise and brain health, many scientists agree that the more we think, the better our brains function.

Activities helpful in maximizing brain health:

- Reading.
- Writing.
- Drawing.
- Playing cards, board games.
- Crossword/jigsaw puzzles.
- Playing musical instruments.
- Dancing.
- Group discussions.
- Cultural experiences, such as going to museums.

**You know you've got to exercise
your brain just like your muscles.**

Will Rogers

EXERCISE YOUR MIND

Memory Aids

In addition to keeping mentally active and engaged, many people with MCI and early dementia find it helpful to use memory aids and other “compensatory strategies” or “brain crutches” to keep better track of new information.

Here are a few tips to make learning and remembering things a little easier:

Slow down. Remind yourself to take your time and to focus on what you are doing.

Get rid of distractions. Create a quiet environment by turning off the radio and TV and moving away from loud conversations.

Stop multi-tasking. Try to start and finish one task at a time before moving on to something new.

Develop habits. Store frequently used items in the same place.

Be selective. Remind yourself of what is truly important to remember and what is okay to forget.

Rehearse. Take 10–15 seconds to rehearse new information in your mind after an important conversation or after hearing or reading something new.

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. Read information more than once.

Talk it out. When you want to remember important ideas, talk about them with other people.

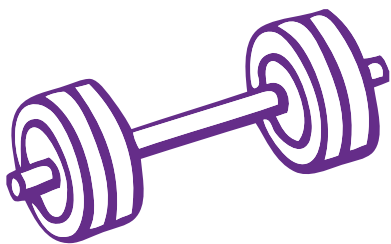
Make associations. Associate new information with something else you already know. For example, you might associate meeting a new person named Julie with an old friend – also named Julie.

Picture it. Create colorful, lively, and outrageous mental pictures of things you want to remember. For example, to remember to pick up tomatoes at the store, picture yourself in the store parking lot during a storm in which large, juicy tomatoes are falling from the sky and splatting on the ground all around you.

Write it down. Take good notes and write yourself reminders. Use a day planner or small notebook for all of your important information (e.g., grocery lists, phone messages, important phone numbers, to do lists, appointments, etc.)

Be patient. Avoid worrying about memory “failures”. Worry can increase memory problems.

You can engage and strengthen your brain by trying new activities. Daily brain workouts, together with memory aids, can help keep your brain working at the highest possible level.



Benefits of Exercising Your Mind

- Keeps life interesting.
- Strengthens brain connections and builds new ones.
- Prevents boredom.
- Inspires passion and creativity.
- Connects you to others.

I never came upon any of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking.

Albert Einstein

Some people with memory loss say...



I am consistent in listening to music, doing crossword puzzles, reading out loud, keeping a calendar, and spending lots of time with family....that has made a major difference.

Ron

I have been pouring into my journals and that is a great brain exercise and encouragement.

Jim

Sudoku starts my day. It forces me think and concentrate differently, it feels good, and it is a jump start.

Earl

The computer brain games absolutely help me really concentrate. I do this many times each day, and it is a fantastic challenge to the brain.

Jim



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Stay curious and involved** – try new things.
- ☐ **Take a class or attend** a lecture on an unfamiliar topic.
- ☐ **Start or join a book club** or other social group for lively discussions.
- ☐ **Write letters or emails.** Keep a journal.
- ☐ **Get creative.** Try painting, drawing, working with clay, or dancing.
- ☐ **Volunteer.**
- ☐ **Attend local concerts,** plays, and other cultural community events.
- ☐ **Teach someone something** you know.
- ☐ **Visit a local museum** – go on a tour.
- ☐ **Identify 1-3 memory aids** to use in your daily life.
- ☐ **Play brain games** on the computer.



Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

[4]

Focus on the Positive

For many people, memory loss and other cognitive changes can be a source of frustration, anger, sadness, anxiety, and discouragement. Alzheimer's disease itself can also cause chemical and structural changes in the brain that lead to changes in mood and emotions. Although some ups and downs are normal, frequent negative feelings can be very damaging to your health and quality of life.

Scientists believe there is an important relationship between emotional health, memory, and dementia. Some studies have shown a link between depression and:

An increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

Cell death in areas of the brain important for memory function.

Faster cognitive decline in those with dementia.

More problems with everyday living skills.

Insomnia, weight loss and frailty.

Earlier placement into nursing homes.



Warning Signs

Many of us think that while it is okay to be physically sick, it is not okay to admit to feelings of sadness, loneliness, anxiety or fear. Taking control of your health means paying close attention to all types of symptoms, both emotional and physical, that could make your condition worse.

In the depth of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.

Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*

Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had it to do over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else. Just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day.

Nadine Stair

Common Mood Symptoms:

- Sadness that does not go away.
- Irritability.
- Mood swings.
- Anxiety and worry.
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in normal activities.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Changes in sleep or appetite.
- Neglect of personal responsibilities or self care.
- Increased use of alcohol.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

Talk to your doctor if you have any of these common symptoms, especially if they last two weeks or more. Seek immediate medical attention if you find yourself thinking about suicide or making a suicide plan.

Keeping Positive

Of course, emotional health is more than just avoiding depression or overcoming anxiety. True emotional wellness is the ability to create and keep a positive attitude, maintain a healthy level of self-esteem, and express a full range of emotions through life's difficulties.

Staying positive takes some practice. One simple way to avoid negativity and to give your mood a boost is to set aside more time for activities that give you pleasure. The possibilities are endless. The important thing is to do something every day that makes you happy, that motivates you, and gives you energy. No matter what types of activities you enjoy, research shows that making time for fun is a prescription for better health.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE



Benefits of Keeping Positive

- Lowers stress, physical tension.
- Improves relationships.
- Improves your thinking ability.
- Improves your physical health.
- Gives you more energy.
- Makes you happier!

[Oh my friend, it's not what they take away from you that counts. It's what you do with what you have left.]

Hubert Humphrey

Some people with memory loss say...



The most important source of happiness is staying centered on the positive side and doing good things for others.

Mike

I am positive about my life, my life today, and time itself. I believe in life as it is.

Jerilynn

Get outside of yourself and focus on someone that has needs. It can be something big or just a quick call to check-in with someone.

Julie

You have to be really on top of it, make a list of things you enjoy and do at least three of them a day.

Ron

Laughter changes everything.

Mike



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Be social and express yourself.** Be open about your feelings.
- ☐ **Make time for fun.** Schedule more time each day for things you enjoy.
- ☐ **Give yourself credit.** Remind yourself often about the things you do well.
- ☐ **Take control.** You have power to change a negative attitude.
- ☐ **Forgive yourself and others.** Don't let negative energy take over your life. Try to let go of grudges and anger as quickly as possible.
- ☐ **Focus on the positive.** Stop every so often and evaluate what you are thinking. When you find yourself being critical, force yourself to think about something positive.
- ☐ **Exercise.** Aerobic exercise can lift mood and relieve stress.
- ☐ **Breathe.** Several deep breaths tell your body that it is okay to relax.
- ☐ **Do something** for someone else. Helping others can give you a boost of positive energy.
- ☐ **Learn from a professional.** A professional counselor can help you develop daily routines and find enjoyable activities. The support you receive can be emotional or it can be practical. Positive feedback can help you avoid negative thinking.
- ☐ **Change your chemistry.** Medications like antidepressants can help to regulate chemicals in the brain that support mood.
- ☐ **Laugh a little.** Smiling and laughing, even when you don't feel happy, can give your mood a boost.
- ☐ **Visit the Taking Charge of Your Health** website for more ideas. www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/create-healthy-lifestyle/emotions-and-attitudes.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

It really is a matter of choosing to look at things from a positive perspective. Instead of looking at the things Ken couldn't do, we started celebrating what he could do - and that was a real gift.

Mary Margaret, Care Partner

Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



[5]

Reduce Stress

Stress is a normal part of life. Contrary to popular belief, stress comes about from things that you want and enjoy as well as from things that are worrisome and threatening.

In the short term, stress can be mentally stimulating, push you to act and grow, and provide motivation to get things done. On the other hand, long-term stress can damage your health and have a negative impact on your mood and your relationships.

Identifying Sources of Stress

Sometimes it is easy to be so absorbed in day-to-day life that we do not stop to notice how much stress and tension we are carrying around with us. To lower the consequences of chronic stress, the first thing to do is to become more aware of what is stressful to you. Try this simple exercise. Ask yourself:

1. What are the one or two things in my life right now that are causing me the most stress?

2. How does this stress affect me? What are my stress symptoms or behaviors? Do I become irritable, argue



with loved ones, develop tense shoulders, get headaches, or think negative thoughts?

3. Are my coping techniques helpful or destructive? Am I using healthy strategies such as exercise, social activities, or frequent breaks to combat stress? Or, am I overeating, watching too much TV, drinking too much, or neglecting things that are important to me?

4. What things can I do now to lower the long-term effects of stress on my body and mind? Can I work to resolve conflict with others, be better prepared for stressful situations, let go of unrealistic expectations, or set aside more time to relax?

While it is nearly impossible to avoid stressful situations altogether, research suggests that how you respond to stress influences how it affects you. It takes practice, but you can change how you react to stress. These strategies can help you get started.

REDUCE STRESS

Blessed are the flexible, for they are least likely to get bent out of shape.

Unknown

Mindful Relaxation

Mindful relaxation is a stress management technique that focuses on breathing to calm the body. Many books and audio recordings are available to help you discover this useful way to lower stress (see References & Resources on page 45). With practice, you can learn to shift your body and mind into “relaxation mode”.

Try these simple steps to get started:

Find a quiet place. Choose a room where you will not be disturbed. Turn off the TV, radio, computer, and telephone.

Get comfortable. Sit or recline in a chair, or lie down on the floor or in bed.

Breathe. Close your eyes and focus on your breath flowing in and out. It may help to actually say, “breathe in, breathe out” with each breath.

Let go. Let thoughts that pop into your mind float by like clouds in the sky – notice them, then re-focus on your breathing.

Practice. Commit time each day for mindful relaxation. Begin with five minutes and increase from there. Twenty minutes once or twice a day is ideal.

There are many other ways to manage stress and the negative effects chronic tension and strain have on your health. The key is to make stress reduction a priority and a part of your daily routine.



You can't stop the waves,
but you can learn to surf.

Unknown



Benefits of Reducing Stress

- Improves memory, attention and concentration.
- Lowers blood pressure.
- Strengthens the immune system.
- Improves your sleep.
- Reduces negative emotions like irritability, anger and anxiety.
- Leads to a happier, healthier life.

REDUCE STRESS

Some people
with
memory
loss say...



One of my greatest sources of happiness is playing in a really good concert band. Nothing makes me more fulfilled than this.

Jim

I think I've got it! It's yoga that has changed my life and impacted my stress level.

Earl

Prayer sets the tone for my day. It is ritual, yet spontaneous.

Ron

Stop! Sit or lie comfortably, quiet your mind and focus on something positive.

Julie

REDUCE STRESS

For fast-acting relief,
try slowing down.

Lily Tomlin

Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Practice mindful relaxation** or take 5-minute breaks during the day to just breathe.
- ☐ **Try yoga or tai chi** – these activities include stretching and strengthening poses, deep breathing, and meditation.
- ☐ **Schedule your time wisely and honestly**, always allowing extra time for interruptions and unexpected changes. Plan breaks throughout the day. Seek out positive and meaningful activities rather than those that are stressful.
- ☐ **Divide large tasks** into smaller steps to make jobs easier.
- ☐ **Exercise to lower tension** in your body, improve sleep, and boost endorphins.
- ☐ **Take a regular nature walk.**
- ☐ **Visit the Taking Charge of Your Health** website for more ideas. www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/create-healthy-lifestyle/stress-mastery/learn-stress-reduction-techniques

Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



[6]

Find Meaning and Purpose

We all strive to find meaning and purpose in life. Some people find purpose in their jobs, while others seek meaning in their family life and relationships. Regardless of how we do it, we all want to feel useful, needed, and engaged in life.

Embrace Change

Finding purpose is a unique and life-long journey. If you take a moment to reflect, you will probably find that your priorities and sense of purpose have evolved over the years. That is because different stages of life pose new questions and challenges, as well as new answers and opportunities.

Transitions, such as advancing age, retirement, or a diagnosis of MCI or Alzheimer's disease can prompt physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual chaos, as you reorganize your life around new circumstances. However, these same challenges also provide an opportunity to rethink priorities and find new directions in life.



In other words, just because you have memory loss or other cognitive changes does not mean that you should let go of what is important to you. In fact, now is a critical time to dig deeply and to discover new ways of engaging in and contributing to life.

Find Your Purpose

Why do you get up in the morning? What things motivate you or give you energy? What activities help you to feel needed or connected to others?

Dick Leider, author of *The Power of Purpose*, asked adults 65 and older, “If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?” The answers consistently included these three themes: 1) be more reflective, 2) be more courageous and 3) find purpose sooner.

**I know we're going to die,
but some of us are going to do something about it.**

Tom Burnett, passenger on United 93 before crashing into the
World Trade Center on September 11, 2001

FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE

**The most important time
in your life is now.**

Deepak Chokra

Take some time now to reflect on what gives you meaning and what things you could do differently to find more purpose in life.

What things am I good at? What are my strengths? _____

What talents have I ignored in recent years? _____

What things am I passionate about? _____

What issues do I feel someone needs to do something about? _____

What are the needs of people in my family, neighborhood, or community? _____

What needs doing right now?

What things am I engaged in that are energizing? What activities are draining? _____

There are many ways to add more meaning and purpose to your day-to-day life. The key is to seek out activities that help you to feel useful, needed, and engaged.





Benefits of Finding Meaning and Purpose

- Gives you a reason to get up in the morning.
- Makes life more interesting, valuable and rewarding.
- Improves your self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Offers the opportunity to make the world a better place.
- Prevents boredom, loneliness and inactivity.
- Helps you focus on something positive and productive.
- Leads to a happier, healthier life.

FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE

Some people with memory loss say...



I chose to get involved because I want a purpose; I want to be engaged and for my life to have meaning. I want to help others who are just like me and use the brain power I do have for something that is good.

Julie

We're the new faces of Alzheimer's, and we're choosing to make a difference.

Dick

Life is really good and we can have a purpose. This is a great time of life. Forget about the word Alzheimer's and focus on the quality of your life.

Jim

I have always volunteered to find solutions. I still focus on that and I still volunteer.

Julie

FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Start each day by making a list** of the 2 or 3 things you would like to do.
- ☐ **Donate** time, money or talents to a charity or non-profit organization.
- ☐ **Find a meaningful volunteer** opportunity that fits your schedule (www.volunteermatch.org).
- ☐ **Become an advocate** for a cause you believe in, such as the Alzheimer's Association (800.272.3900).
- ☐ **Take more time for spiritual activities**, such as prayer or meditation.
- ☐ **Join a new community**; spiritual or religious groups, support groups, social clubs, and neighborhood associations.
- ☐ **Write a memoir** or jot down pieces of your life story.
- ☐ **Research your family history** (www.ancestry.com).

- ☐ **Brainstorm with family** members and friends about ways to get together more often for fun and connection.
- ☐ **Participate in research** (www.alz.org/Trialmatch).
- ☐ **Visit the Taking Charge of Your Health** website for more ideas. www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/create-healthy-lifestyle/life-purpose-and-spirituality

Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

[7]

Keep Relationships Strong

Did you know that healthy relationships are a vital component of overall health? Social connections provide a sense of security and meaning. They help us feel loved, useful, and needed. Strong family ties, good friendships, and involvement in social activities also increase self-esteem and provide a buffer against stress, anxiety and depression.

Sometimes it can be difficult to be socially active and to stay connected to people around us. For example, there may be times when you are frustrated by the cognitive difficulties you are experiencing, such as memory loss



or word finding problems. A natural reaction might be to feel embarrassed, to avoid social gatherings, or to withdraw from people and activities you used to enjoy. For many people, finding the energy or drive to be social can also be a challenge because the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease may include a decline in motivation.

To live well with MCI or dementia, many experts agree that it is important to keep your existing relationships strong **and** to push yourself to stay as socially engaged and active as possible.

The health risks of being alone or isolated can be comparable in size to the risks associated with cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, and obesity. People with limited social networks may be more likely to develop dementia compared to those living socially rich lives.

KEEP RELATIONSHIPS STRONG

**No man is an island,
entire of itself.**

John Donne,
Meditation XVII

Keeping Relationships Strong

Keeping good relationships takes time and energy. Here are a few tips for nurturing the relationships you have today:

Spend more time with friends and family.

Express yourself. Share your honest thoughts and feelings.

Let go a little more often.

Negativity and anger are unhealthy and increase stress.

Accept yourself for who you are. We all have strengths and weaknesses. It is okay to make mistakes.

Strive for balance. Be comfortable with both giving and receiving support.

Be thankful. Let people know more often how much you love and appreciate them.

Minimize negative influences.

Spend less time with people who tend to be negative or critical.



[No road is long
with good company.]

Unknown



Benefits of Keeping Relationships Strong

- Increases brain power by improving your cognitive reserve.
- Promotes a longer, healthier life.
- Lowers blood pressure and your body's reaction to stress.
- Improves the immune system's ability to fight infection and disease.

Some people with memory loss say...



It's wonderful knowing that my friends are around me and that they can help me.

Jerilynn

It has really helped to have people to talk to. There are a lot of losses, and many struggles, like giving up driving, but the love that is coming back to me gives me strength.

Ken

Make dates, see friends, volunteer. You still have a life.

Julie

I work on new friendships and relationships with people who know me for who I am now with dementia. I find these friends offer me the greatest support and spiritual sustenance.

Mike

KEEP RELATIONSHIPS STRONG



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Schedule a regular lunch** date with a friend.
- ☐ **Volunteer your time** at a place where you can meet new people.
- ☐ **Strike up a conversation** with someone while waiting in line at the grocery store or the bank.
- ☐ **Go to religious services** early or stay late afterward to socialize.
- ☐ **Find other people** who share one of your hobbies.
- ☐ **Plan a regular walk** with a neighbor.
- ☐ **Make plans** to visit a relative.
- ☐ **Join a new group** or social club (try www.MeetUp.com for ideas).
- ☐ **Take the initiative.** Spend time planning ahead to get things on your social calendar.
- ☐ **Go to the coffee shop** once a week.
- ☐ **Join a cause**, such as the fight against Alzheimer's, and be part of a larger group of people with a mutual passion.

- ☐ **Call up old friends.**
- ☐ **Connect with others** who have MCI or Alzheimer's disease.
- ☐ **Visit the Taking Charge of Your Health** website for more ideas. www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/create-healthy-lifestyle/relationships-family

Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

[8]

Manage Your Health

Every day you make thousands of decisions. Each one may seem small, but over time, the choices you make and the risks you take all impact your health.

A diagnosis of MCI, Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia is a call to action – a call to pay more attention to how you feel and to seek help when you sense something is wrong. Living well with memory loss means actively managing your health, making wise choices, and doing everything you can to stay at the top of your game.

Focus on Wellness

It is important to schedule regular visits with your doctor so you have time to focus on wellness and prevention, in addition to management and treatment of your symptoms.

Just how often you should see your doctor depends upon many factors, such as your age, gender, family history, and the number and severity of your health conditions. However, if you have MCI or dementia, seeing your doctor at least



every 6 months – even when you feel healthy – is best. You may need to make additional appointments when you start new medications or when new symptoms develop.

Take Charge of Your Health

If you want to stay as healthy as possible, it is not enough to see your doctor on a regular basis. You need to be an active participant in treatment decisions, communicate openly and honestly, know your options, and understand how to follow doctor's orders.

It is okay to do your own research, to ask questions, to request more information, express doubt, and to seek out a second opinion. Bringing family members with you to doctor visits is also a good idea to enhance communication and help keep everybody informed and on the same page.

MANAGE YOUR HEALTH

Tips for Your Doctor Visits:

- **Bring a friend or family member** with you to all appointments.
- **Plan ahead.** Write down the top 3 things you want to discuss with the doctor and bring your list to the visit.
- **Be honest** about your symptoms and concerns.
- **Ask questions.**
- **Be proactive.** Call your doctor if you develop new symptoms or have new questions.

Get Enough Sleep

Unfortunately, sleep problems are common with MCI and Alzheimer's disease. Paying close attention to your sleep is important because studies have linked poor sleep with many health problems. For example, waking up often at night and being sleepy during the day contribute to poor concentration and faster mental decline. Sleep problems are also associated with:

- Depression, irritability, and other mood symptoms.
- Decreased ability to perform daily activities.
- Increased likelihood of nursing home placement.

Experts recommend that, on average, adults should get between 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. While a brief daily nap (60 minutes or less) can be refreshing, sleeping too much during the day can be unhealthy.

Limit Alcohol

Alcohol is a sedative and slows down your brain's ability to coordinate movement, manage reflexes, process information, and produce speech. While some studies suggest moderate alcohol use (typically defined as less than 1-2 eight-ounce beverages daily) may offer several health benefits, heavier drinking has been associated with many negative consequences.

Drinking too much alcohol can have immediate effects on your brain, causing poor concentration, poor judgment and impaired motor skills. Frequent heavy drinking can also cause permanent brain damage and increase memory loss.

Protect Your Blood Vessels

A rich supply of blood vessels feeds your brain. The health of your circulatory system affects the overall health of your brain and heart. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and smoking are risk factors for vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Watch your weight, cholesterol

**Take a rest, a field that has rested
gives a bountiful crop.**

Ovid

levels, and blood pressure closely. Talk to your doctor about how to reduce your risk of cerebrovascular disease.

Watch Your Blood Sugar

Many studies have shown that diabetes increases a person's risk of developing MCI and Alzheimer's disease. Poorly controlled blood sugar is associated with a higher risk of cognitive decline, particularly problems with memory. If you have pre-diabetes or diabetes, regularly monitoring your blood sugar is a vital step toward protecting your brain.

Play It Safe

Accidents happen to the best of us, but sometimes the results can be quite damaging to our health or limit our independence. Planning ahead can help you avoid many accidents. For example, if you have problems with your balance or have fallen in the past, make it a priority to use your cane or walker to avoid a broken bone, head injury, or unnecessary hospitalization. If you, or someone who cares about you, have concerns about your driving, complete a driving evaluation to receive expert

advice on your safety behind the wheel. Although it may be difficult, keep an open mind in response to friends and family who express concern about your safety. Playing it safe today will keep you independent tomorrow.





Benefits of Managing Your Health

- Promotes a healthier life.
- Helps you to stay well and live independently.
- Helps you to avoid going to the hospital or nursing home.
- Lowers long-term healthcare costs.
- Helps you to feel your best physically and mentally every day.



Some people with memory loss say...



Communicate! Communicate!

This is what makes my relationship with my doctor a good one.

Julie

One thing that makes a difference is assuring a good night of sleep.

Jim

I do well and feel less stress when I organize my medications in a day by day container.

Steve

I manage my health by being thankful everyday and loving others around me.

Jerilynn



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Schedule regular wellness visits** with your doctor.
- ☐ **Manage your medications.** Use a pillbox and sign up for mail-order prescriptions and automatic refills.
- ☐ **Promote healthy sleep habits:**
 - Go to bed and wake up around the same times each day.
 - Nap for 60 minutes or less if you are tired.
 - Get more exercise.
 - Expose yourself to natural light.
 - Avoid decongestants, alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine after dinner.
- ☐ **If you use alcohol, drink in moderation** and know your limits.
- ☐ **Cut back or quit smoking.**
- ☐ **Keep your body weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels within recommended ranges.**

- ☐ **Identify one activity or problem that poses a safety risk.** Take steps to reduce the potential for harm or unnecessary health problems.
- ☐ **Visit the Taking Charge of Your Health** website for more ideas. www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/create-healthy-lifestyle/self-care-and-prevention

Your Plan

(List 1-3 things you will try):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

[9]

Establish a Routine

At this point, you have learned a lot about different strategies to live well with MCI and early dementia. Hopefully, you have chosen some things from each chapter to weave into your daily life.

Living well with MCI and Alzheimer's disease does not happen by accident. Making sure your brain and body are working at the top of their potential takes some planning and effort. This effort will pay off in the long run for you and the people who care about you.

Building a routine, or a regular schedule, is the key to making sure you are successful now and over time. Routines support memory and help us to develop habits. We usually think of habits as bad things, like biting your fingernails or smoking, but it is also possible to develop good habits, like exercising every day. As we all know, a habit is hard to break – even for people with MCI and early dementia. Creating a new, healthy routine can provide structure to your days and help to keep you engaged and active in your life.



Follow three simple steps to get started:

1. **Develop** a Plan.
2. **Schedule** It.
3. **Try** It Out.

Step 1: Develop a Plan

If you have gotten this far, you have already accomplished this step. Congratulations! **Review Your Plan** from each chapter to get started.

Step 2: Schedule It.

Create a weekly calendar that includes the elements of your plan. Here are some tips that can help you build a healthy routine:

- ✓ **Set regular times** for meals, waking up and going to bed (for example, wake up every day at 8 a.m., lunch at noon, dinner at 7:30 p.m., and go to bed at 11 p.m.).
- ✓ **Make sure to include** some type of exercise every day.
- ✓ **It may help to try to eat** certain foods on certain days.

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

- ✓ **Build in time** for mental exercises.
- ✓ **Include your volunteer activities**, hobbies, and other regular tasks.
- ✓ **Schedule regular time** to visit with friends and family.
- ✓ **Make sure to note** when you take your medications.
- ✓ **Make time for relaxing**, stress reducing activities – don't forget the fun stuff.

An example of a completed weekly calendar and a blank calendar for you to complete are on pages 38 and 41, respectively.

Step 3: Try It Out.

Once you have put a plan in place, try it. After a month, ask yourself these questions:

- **How is my plan working overall?** _____

- **Did I over-plan or under-plan?**

- **What things are working well?**

- **What things are not working well?** _____

Why not? _____

- **What keeps me from doing things on my plan?** _____

- **What could I do instead?**

- **What needs to change?**

Once you have things down, stick to your new routine as much as possible. Getting into a routine helps you to build habits that support your memory and allow you to stay independent.

Weekly Calendar

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

MONTH: AUGUST						
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
M O R N I N G						
7 A.M. WAKE						
7:30 A.M. MEDITATION						
8:30 a.m. Mediterranean breakfast	8:30 a.m. Heart Healthy breakfast	8:30 a.m. Mediterranean breakfast	8:30 a.m. Heart Healthy breakfast	8:30 a.m. Mediterranean breakfast	8:30 a.m. Mediterranean breakfast	9 a.m. Religious Services
9:30 a.m. Gardening		10 a.m. Water Aerobics	9:30 a.m. Golf with Jim	9:30 a.m. Gardening	10 a.m. Water Aerobics	10:30 a.m. Brunch with Friends
A F T E R N O O N						
12 p.m. Lunch with friends	12 p.m. Lunch	12 p.m. Lunch at the gym	12 p.m. Lunch with Jim	12 p.m. Lunch with friends	12 p.m. Lunch at the gym	1-2 p.m. Nap
2 p.m. Card club	2 p.m. Volunteer	2-3 p.m. Nap		2 p.m. Volunteer		3 p.m. Snack
E V E N I N G						
6 p.m. Walk with Gail	6 p.m. Yoga Class		6 p.m. Walk with Gail			6 p.m. Yoga Class
7:30 p.m. Brain Healthy Dinner	7:30 p.m. Brain Healthy Dinner	7:30 p.m. Dinner with Neighbors	7:30 p.m. Brain Healthy Dinner	7:30 p.m. Brain Healthy Dinner	7:30 p.m. Brain Healthy Dinner	7:30 p.m. Family Dinner
11 P.M. BED						



Benefits of Establishing a Routine

- Helps you form healthy habits that support memory and independent living.
- Gives you a way to keep track of things you want to do.
- Lowers anxiety and stress.
- Helps you plan ahead to ensure you keep busy and stay active.



ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

Some people with memory loss say...



Patterns are a good thing.

They make my day easier and offer more independence.

Julie

I found I was most

comfortable doing many of the same things at the same time every day.

Mike

I look at what my goal is, lay out what I will do, and get into a routine.

Ron

I use a calendar to schedule things I need to remember.

Earl

Be sure there is not more

activity than you have time for and leave enough time for a nap.

Mike

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE



Things You Can Do Now (Opportunities):

- ☐ **Post it.** Put your weekly schedule up on the refrigerator or in another location that you see every day.
- ☐ **Refine it.** Try your plan for the next month. Make changes to things that do not work or that you do not like.
- ☐ **Just Do It.** Once your plan and schedule are set, do your best to follow the calendar each day until it becomes a habit.
- ☐ **Keep It Up!**

Your Plan

Fill in the calendar on page 41 with your weekly schedule.



Weekly Calendar

MONTH:							MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	
							M O R N I N G							
							WAKE ____ A.M.							
							A F T E R N O O N							
							E V E N I N G							
							B E D ____ P.M.							

[10]

Resources and References




UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Center for Spirituality & Healing
Driven to DiscoverSM



The ***Taking Action* workbook** is a companion guide for people with MCI and early dementia. It covers practical topics such as telling others about the diagnosis, coping with changes, making decisions, legal and financial planning, and more. An online version is available at: www.alz.org/mnnd/documents/2010_Taking_Action_e-book.pdf.

A complementary online site, **Taking Charge of Your Health**, offers detailed information and a chance to build on the plan you develop in this workbook (www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/lifestyle).

The Alzheimer's Association offers information, education and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call **800.272.3900** or visit our website at www.alz.org.

Get Moving

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Eat Healthy

RESOURCES

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