

Being Active with Alzheimer's Disease

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Being active can help people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD) feel better, move better and sleep better. Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health – even just a few minutes!

Regular physical activity helps those with ADRD develop better strength, balance, walking speed and endurance. It also reduces physical decline and preserves day-to-day function, including

sleeping habits. When people with ADRD become active, safety is a priority. Caregivers and health professionals should always exercise with the person with ADRD. That way, both will reap the health benefits of being active!



Getting Started

Keep It Simple

Sit less and move around more! Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Find opportunities to be active throughout the day. It all adds up.

Talk with the Doctor

Talk to a health care provider or neurologist before starting a new activity program. Ask if the person with ADRD is on a drug that can affect reactions to exercise. Are there any exercises the person with ADRD should avoid?

Build A Plan

Find a way to be active with the loved one with ADRD. Is there a better time of day? Do they have the right clothes and shoes? Are there activities they enjoy? In general, start low and go slow.

Get Excited

Preliminary evidence shows that exercise may be capable of improving physical and brain (cognitive) function in people with ADRD and can even delay its progression.

Alzheimer's Tips and Cautions

Break exercises into simple, easy-to-follow steps. Keep an exercise log, so you can pick up where you left off.

Be realistic about how much activity can be done at one time. Multiple “mini-workout” sessions during the day may be the best.

Exercising in the morning might work better, as morning is often when people with ADRD have the lowest severity of symptoms.

Add preferred kinds of music to the exercises so they are more fun. Dance to the music, if possible.

Whether a person with ADRD can perform an activity on their own depends on the severity of the disease. If they walk alone, provide them with a medical ID bracelet or a location device.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases heart rate and breathing to build stamina. Build up to doing at least 90-180 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like a brisk walk, light cycling, dancing or water exercise). If the person with ADRD is not able to achieve this amount, they shouldn't be discouraged. Some activity is better than none!

What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity

How hard?

Light to somewhat hard

To stay safe and injury free:

- Start with light to medium effort.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active.
- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace (e.g., marching) before and after exercise.

How often?

3 days/week

How much?

Start w/ a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30 to 60 total minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20 to 30 minutes. Be active however and wherever you can.

Strength Training

Strength training can make daily activities like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer. Getting stronger, particularly in the legs, stomach and back, can help prevent falls.

What?

Hand weights (can also use cans, bottles, groceries), resistance bands, weight machines or their own bodyweight (for example, kitchen counter or wall push-ups or sit-to-stands)

How often?

2-3 days/week *Rest day in between

How hard?

Start with light effort. Build up to medium or hard effort.

How much?

1 to 3 sets of 8 to 12 repetitions

Remember: Improving muscle strength and endurance happens gradually over time. If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly. Avoid straining or breath-holding when lifting – this may cause blood pressure to go up.

Other Types of Physical Activity

Aerobic activity and strength training are at the heart of a program for those with Alzheimer's. These other options may help and be enjoyed.

Combo Activities

Combine aspects of aerobic, strength, coordination, flexibility and balance training during one activity session. Make it fun! Or try things like yoga or Tai Chi.

Flexibility

Stretch at least 2-3 days/week to a point of tightness. Hold 10-30 seconds, 2-4 times. For example, stretch the calves or the back of the thighs.

Range of Motion

Gently move joints through a full range of motion. Do 10 repetitions of activities such as knee slides, wrist and shoulder circles. Motion is lotion!

Balance

These activities improve the ability to resist forces that cause falls. For example, walk heel-to-toe, stand (no hands) from a sitting position, stand on one foot, walk on a line, use a balance board or try Tai Chi. Train in an uncluttered area and use a chair or wall for support, if needed.

Final Words:

People with ADRD are safe to be active as long as they are guided and monitored in a similar fashion to older adults without ADRD. Physical activity for people with ADRD should be adjusted based on the person's symptoms and physical status. Progress at a rate that helps them stick with it. Exercise in nursing homes or senior facilities is encouraged when there are properly trained staff to monitor safety.

How will I get started **this week?** _____

More Help

Go to www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

Start where you are. Use what you have. **Do what you can.**

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