

## **Lifestyle Factors for those with Dementia and Alzheimer's**

Physical Activity and a nutritious diet can help people stay healthy. We know that healthy diet and exercise can reduce obesity, lower blood cholesterol and high blood pressure, and improve insulin action. We are learning now that pursuing intellectually stimulating activities and maintaining active contacts with friends and family may also contribute to healthy aging.

### **Physical Activity and Exercise:**

Exercise strengthens muscles, improves heart and lung function, helps prevent osteoporosis and improves mood and overall well-being. Epidemiologic studies, animal studies and human clinical trials are assessing the influence of exercise on cognitive function and have found the following:

- \*Animal studies have shown that exercise increases the number of capillaries that supply blood to the brain and improves learning and memory in older animals.

- \*High levels of physical activity or exercise in older people are associated with reduced risk of cognitive decline and reduced risk of dementia. Even moderate exercise such as brisk walking, is associated with reduced risk.

- \*Clinical trials show some evidence of short-term positive effects of exercise on cognitive function, especially executive function (cognitive abilities involved in planning, organizing, and decision making).

### **Diet:**

Studies have shown some specific foods that are rich in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties can change the brain tissue.

- \*One laboratory study found that curcumin, the main ingredient of turmeric can prevent harmful formation in the brain tissue.

- \*Another study found that diets high in DHA, a type of healthy omega-3 fatty acid found in fish, reduced plaque on the brain.

- \*Other studies have shown improved performance by eating foods rich in antioxidants such as vitamin E.

- \*Another study of nurses found an association between participants who ate the most vegetables especially green leafy and cruciferous vegetables and a slower rate of cognitive decline compared to nurses who ate the least of these foods.

- \*The Mediterranean diet- a diet with lots of fruits, vegetables, and bread; low to moderate amounts of dairy foods, fish and poultry; small amounts of red meat; low to moderate amounts of wine; and frequent use of olive oil. Researchers found that sticking to this type of diet was associated with a reduced risk of AD.

Information and excerpts taken from "Alzheimer's Disease; Unraveling the mystery" put out by the U.S Dept of health and human services NIH. In September of 2008.