

New Year's Resolution-Making the Commitment

Heads up for a happy and healthy New Year! Welcome to 2008 and all of the exciting possibilities that the New Year has to offer. This is your opportunity to start fresh, make positive changes and improve your quality of life. For some, what changes to make and where to begin can be overwhelming. The Alzheimer Society of Manitoba wants you to know that making the connection between healthy living and a healthy brain is as easy as making a commitment to better brain health. This commitment can lead to a better quality of life now and into your future.

Research continues to show that by challenging your brain, being socially active, choosing a healthy lifestyle and protecting your head, you can help to maintain or improve your brain health. This is something that can also help to reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, or even help to slow its progression in people already living with the disease. Encourage everyone in your family to get involved. It is never too early or too late to make changes and take charge of your health.

Sounds great, right? So how do you get started? First, make the commitment to yourself and your loved ones. Realizing that you deserve this is a great first step.

Step two, challenge your brain. Now is the perfect time to try something new, learn to play a new instrument, take a course or learn a new language. Play games such as chess, crosswords and memory games. Alone or with loved ones, games are a fun way to keep your mind active. To really awaken your mind, change the way you do an everyday task. Brush your hair with your less dominant hand or say the alphabet backwards. Straying from your comfort zone is like an aerobic workout for your brain.

Social interaction is the third step in your journey towards improved health. (After all, who doesn't enjoy a good party?) Plan an event with family and friends. Birthdays, anniversaries or just because are all opportunities to socialize with those you love. Working is another way to stay socially active. Interacting with co-workers challenges your mind and allows you to develop valuable communication skills. Retired? Try volunteering. Sharing personal interests is the perfect excuse to get together with others. Join a group that interests you such as a sports team, sewing club, etc.

The fourth step involves adopting a healthy lifestyle. Don't panic. Taking small steps is the key to making changes and maintaining them over a long period of time. Start by making healthy food choices. Shake it up, vary your diet with dark-coloured fruits and vegetables, foods that are rich in anti-oxidants such as blueberries and spinach and fish/canola oils which are rich in omega 3 oils. Desserts are fine in moderation, depriving yourself completely of special treats will make long term change difficult.

Next, increase your physical activity. Not only will this boost your brain, it will benefit the rest of your body as well, reducing the risk of heart attacks, stroke and diabetes. Not to mention how fabulous you will look at your next social engagement.

Massage anyone? Reducing your stress levels, through whatever means works for you, is another positive lifestyle choice you should make. Finally, see your doctor regularly for check-ups and specific health concerns.

Hopefully this last step involves things that you are already doing. Wearing an approved helmet when participating in sporting activities, a seatbelt while driving *safely* and using safety features such as handrails reduce your risk of brain injury. By protecting your head you are caring for your brain now and improving your odds for a healthy future.

Your brain is one of your most vital organs, well worth the commitment to keep it healthy. To make that Commitment easier, the Alzheimer society is providing a Heads Up for a Healthy New Year checklist and specific weekly tasks that will be posted each Monday on our website calendar. Check out each week's activity and start your journey to improved brain health.

Healthy New Year Checklist

1. Make the Commitment:

- Commit to making the changes that will benefit you and your loved ones

2. Challenge your brain:

- Learn something new (take a class, learn a language, learn an instrument)
- Play games (chess, crosswords, etc.)
- Change the way you do an everyday task (say the alphabet backwards, comb your hair with the opposite hand, etc.)

3. Socialize:

- Plan a party
- Work or Volunteer with others
- Join a team or club

4. Live a healthy lifestyle:

- Eat healthy foods (dark-coloured fruits and vegetables, foods rich in anti-oxidants such as blueberries and spinach, fish/canola oils)
- Be physically active. Participate in any physical activity that you enjoy (dancing, walking, golfing, etc.)
- Reduce Stress (massage, reading, etc.)
- See your Doctor for regular checkups and specific health concerns.

5. Use safety precautions:

- Wear safety gear when working or participating in sports (helmets, hard hats, etc.)
- Use safety devices (handrails, non-skid mats, etc.)
- Drive and operate machinery safely

6. Check out our website:

- See what challenges we have for you each Monday on our website calendar