




Healthy brain, healthy life

A guide to reducing your risk of developing dementia




The **Department of Health and Social Services** provides emergency, primary, secondary and community healthcare in the Islands as well as social services assistance, support and advice.

Our mission is to provide high quality, cost-effective health and social care which address the needs of the community we serve, fairly and equitably. This includes people living in Stanley, Camp and the Outer Islands.

The department is headed by the Director of Health and Social Services, who is responsible to the Chief Executive of the Falkland Islands Government. Overall clinical responsibility lies with the Chief Medical Officer who is also the Government's adviser for public health matters.

Part of the Department of Health and Social Services is the Community Support Team which was established in 2017. Care is provided as clinically required across a 24 hour, 365 days a year schedule for people who have been assessed as having care needs and who have an agreed, individual care plan. The team provides care services for people who have been assessed as needing community support within Stanley (whether this be at home in the community, sheltered accommodation or residential care) as capacity allows. A limited advice service is available to those living in Camp.

An assisted bathing programme is also provided (based on need) by the Community Support Team. Additionally, the Community Support Workers are supporting the social activity programme being developed to provide a programme across the week with the aim of increasing social and occupational opportunities for all members of the community – this service is open to all.



The service is led by the Community Support Manager and the wider team comprises District Nurses, Occupational Therapy, Activity Coordinator, Community Support Workers (providing care at the residential unit as well as in people's own homes) and administrative support.

Contact details for the Department of Health and Social Services and Community Support Service can be found at the end of this document.

The **Public Health Unit**, which sits in the Policy and Economic Development Directorate was established with a remit which includes research, establishing an evidence base for improvements in population health as well as supporting and delivering health promotion initiatives for the community.

Contact details for the Public Health Unit and website links for resources to support health promotion can be found at the end of this document.



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Your brain

The brain is an incredible organ. It is made up of different parts, which work together to keep you alive and to carry out everyday tasks and functions for the body.

Keeping your brain healthy is essential for living a fulfilling, healthy and long life. Research from science tells us that a brain-healthy lifestyle can reduce risk of developing dementia in later life.

No matter what your age, there are simple changes that can be made to improve and protect brain health.

The good news, **it is never too late to get started.**

Your brain and ageing

As we age, changes occur in our brain that can affect our memory and thinking. **This is normal.**


Some of the common changes we may experience include:

- Forgetting names
- Losing things e.g. our car keys
- Forgetting things
- Forgetting directions
- Forgetting appointments
- Difficulties completing familiar tasks
- Changes in mood and personality



Factors that can affect memory and thinking:

- Being tired
- Being dehydrated
- Experiencing stress, grief, pain or anxiety
- Certain medications

- 
- Infections, acute illness or nutrient deficiencies
 - Depression
 - Hormonal changes
 - Sensory impairment

All of these things can and do happen, even in younger people. In many cases, there are things that you can do to reverse, manage or resolve these changes.

When you should be concerned

When changes in memory or thinking regularly impact your daily life, you may need further support.

These may include:

- Trouble remembering the day and date
- Trouble remembering recent events
- Problems handling financial matters
- Difficulty following or joining in conversations, particularly in group settings
- Losing interest in activities you normally enjoy

One reason for these could be dementia. **Dementia is not a normal part of ageing.**

If you are experiencing some of these changes frequently, you should arrange to see your GP sooner rather than later.

Understanding dementia

Dementia describes a collection of symptoms caused by diseases affecting the brain.

Common diseases include:

- Alzheimer's disease
- Vascular dementia
- Frontotemporal dementia
- Lewy body dementia

All of these diseases cause a progressive decline which impact the brain's ability for thinking, memory, language and problem solving.

Over time, parts of the brain become damaged, which affects a person's ability to function as they did previously.

This is not a normal part of ageing.

Can you prevent dementia?

While there is no certain way to absolutely prevent dementia and some risk factors are beyond our control, such as getting older, genetics and family history, there are many health and lifestyle factors we can manage which can **reduce our risk** of developing dementia or delaying the onset of symptoms.

It's never too late to make a change

Being brain healthy is important at any age but particularly when you reach mid-life. We can always be doing things to improve our brain health at any age, not just when we are getting older.

Reducing your risk of dementia

Health and lifestyle factors contribute to between 35-50% of dementia cases worldwide. These factors include:

- Cardiovascular health conditions
- Physical inactivity
- Hearing loss
- Sleep disturbance
- Nutritional inadequacy
- Low levels of complex mental health activity or stimulation in early life
- Depression
- Social isolation

The good news is, all of these factors can be minimised, modified or improved upon to reduce our risk. Incorporating simple changes at any stage of our life can lower the risk of developing dementia.

Risk reduction for dementia focuses on being brain healthy. You can do reduce risk by **creating a healthier heart, body and mind. The earlier we adopt a brain healthy lifestyle the better.**

Looking after your heart

Many people are unaware of the connection between heart health and brain health.

Research indicates that cardiovascular conditions, i.e. those that affect the heart and blood vessels, are linked to a higher risk of developing dementia later in life.

These conditions include:

- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- High cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes
- Obesity
- Heart disease

These conditions are often linked to lifestyle risk factors such as smoking, excessive alcohol intake, physical inactivity and a poorly balanced diet.

Ways to improve your heart health

Get regular health check-ups

Monitor your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose levels especially if you have a family history of cardiovascular disease.

Maintain a healthy weight

Adopt eating patterns which provide a healthy varied diet and appropriate portion size. Speak to health professional if you need help and support to develop a balanced diet for health.

Stop smoking – it is never too late!

Smoking affects both the heart and the brain. It increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer as well as increasing your risk of developing dementia. There is no safe level of smoking. There are many sources of

help and support to help you to quit, including nicotine replacement therapies, gums, patches and sprays. Get started by speaking with your GP.

Limit your alcohol intake

Excessive alcohol intake over time can result in brain damage that produces symptoms of dementia. If you drink alcohol staying within the low-risk guidelines of no more than 14 units per week is recommended (see below).

New Government Alcohol Guidelines

What's changing?

Drinkaware explains

Unit guidelines are now the **SAME** for men & women. **BOTH** are advised **not to regularly drink** more than **14 units a week**

This is what 14 units looks like:

6 pints of 4% beer

6 glasses of 13% wine

175ml glasses of wine

BUT don't 'save up' your 14 units, it's best to **spread evenly** across the **week** & have **regular drink-free days**

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

Note: 175ml 13% ABV wine and 4% ABV beer

If you're **pregnant** you **shouldn't** drink alcohol at all

Keep the short-term health risks low by:

- **limiting** the total amount of **alcohol** in **one session**
- **drinking** more **slowly**, alternating with **food** and/or **water**

The **new guidelines** have been set at a level to keep the **risk of cancers** or other diseases **low**.

drinkaware

Image credit: Drinkaware. Further information, advice and support can be found at www.drinkaware.co.uk.

Looking after your body

Being fit and healthy is important for your brain. You can maintain the health of your body and reduce your risk of developing dementia by:

- Increasing your physical activity
- Maintaining a healthy, varied and balanced diet
- Maintaining healthy sleep patterns
- Checking your hearing and other senses
- Protecting your head

Increasing your physical activity

A lack of physical activity is one of the highest contributing risk factors to cognitive decline and dementia in later life. Being physically active keeps the brain healthy and improves memory and thinking by:

- Supporting blood flow and oxygen supply to the brain
- Increasing new brain cells
- Contributing to brain reserve
- Protecting brain function in later life

In addition, being physically active also:

- Reduces risk of developing conditions that affect our heart and brain (e.g. high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease)
- Improves mood
- Improves sleep patterns
- Helps to reduce the risk of falls
- Can support social wellbeing by engaging you with other people

How much physical activity should I do?

Find ways to be active that you enjoy and include a variety of activities that work different muscle groups and joints in the body to meet the guidelines below for cardiovascular activity. This will help to build your aerobic fitness, strength, flexibility and balance.

Did you know...

...keeping your body active also helps your mental health. Finding activities that you enjoy not only benefits your physical health and fitness, but your overall wellbeing.

75 MINUTES PER WEEK
OF VIGOROUS INTENSITY
(breathing fast, difficulty
talking)

or

150 MINUTES PER
WEEK OF MODERATE
INTENSITY
(increased breathing, able
to talk)

or

A COMBINATION OF BOTH

REMEMBER!

Any physical activity is better than none.
Start small and build up gradually. We all
have to start somewhere!



Ways to increase your physical activity


Getting started can often be the hardest part so the key is to find activities that you enjoy doing. Perhaps you might want to learn a new activity such as Zumba, dance classes, swimming, fitness classes or yoga. Or maybe you want to re-visit a sport or activity that you had previously enjoyed.

Motivation and support can be critical to helping to support you with new health habits, there is a lot available. You can find out about different clubs, organisations and activities via the Community Directory [Public Resources \(falklands.gov.fk\)](https://www.falklands.gov.fk/public-resources) or keeping an eye out for events in local media to help you stay motivated.

If you are short on time (aren't we all!) perhaps looking to build activity into your daily routines would work for you. Walking short distances when running errands instead of driving, committing to walking or cycling to work a few times per week or planning in time for the whole family to be active on the weekend.

If you have been inactive for a long time or have a serious health condition and are worried about starting to be more physically active consult your GP for advice to get started.





Maintaining a healthy, varied and balanced diet

Your body and brain need a wide variety of nutrients to carry out all their daily functions. A diet which is rich in vitamins, mineral and essential fatty acids can help to protect the brain by promoting important anti-inflammatory and antioxidant processes.

A diet which is healthy, varied and balanced helps to maintain a healthy body weight and decreases the risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, stroke or high blood pressure which in turn decreases the risk of developing dementia.

What diet is best for preventing dementia?

While there is no specific diet associated with preventing dementia, evidence shows that healthy eating patterns are associated with better brain health.

Dietary guidelines provide information for eating a varied and balanced diet. The key points are:

Aim for variety from each of the food groups daily

Aiming to get at least 5 servings of vegetables and fruit in our diet daily in a range of colours will ensure we get a wide variety of vitamins and minerals. (see the below poster for serving size and hints and tips).



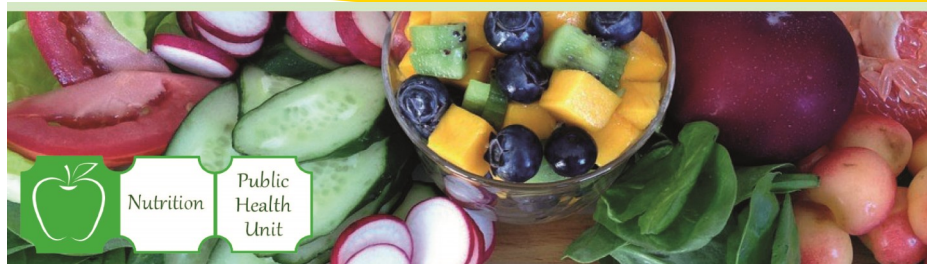
Note:

Most foods are a combination of nutrients so for example beans and pulses are a food source which is high in protein and fibre and low in fat but 1 serving can also count as one of your at least 5-A-Day. Nuts and seeds are a great source of vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids but are also high in fat so therefore should be eaten in smaller amounts.

Each day, aim for:



	At least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables	5+
	3-4 portions of starchy foods	3-4
	2-3 portions of protein foods	2-3
	2-3 portions of dairy/alternatives	2-3
	Small amounts of unsaturated oils and spreads	SMALL AMOUNTS



Eat a rainbow of colours!

Why is it important to have at least 5-A-Day?

Vegetables and fruit provide a wide range of vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals needed for good health, as well as fibre which is important for the digestive system and can help reduce the risk of developing heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer.

It is important to eat a wide variety of vegetables and fruit, as each type provides different amounts and combinations of nutrients.

Remember potatoes, while being a good source of fibre, vitamin C and potassium does not count towards your 5-A-Day - but do count as a starchy carbohydrate the same as bread, pasta or rice of which we require 3-4 portions daily.

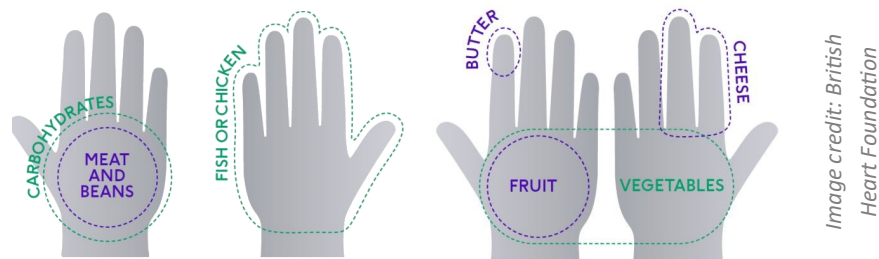
What counts as one portion?

Fresh, frozen or canned (in water or juice) vegetables or fruit	80g	An 80g portion is approx. One medium sized piece of fruit such as a banana, pear, apple or orange; Two small fruits such as plums, satsumas, kiwi or apricots; One dessert bowl of salad; Three heaped teaspoons of vegetables such as peas, carrots or swede.
Dried fruit	30g	A 30g portion counts as one portion of your 5-a-day. This can be three dates, three apricots or one heaped teaspoon of raisins, sultanas or cherries.
100% vegetable/fruit juices or smoothies	150ml (counts only once)	150ml counts as a maximum of one portion per day, even if more than one portion is eaten.
Beans and pulses	80g (counts only once)	Beans and pulses such as lentils, kidney beans, baked beans or chick peas count as a maximum of one portion per day even if more than one portion is eaten.

We need 30g of fibre per day for digestive health, vegetables and fruits are great contributors!
Fibre per portion (80g).

Peas	Brussel Sprouts	Carrots	Spinach	Sweetcorn	Raspberries	Prunes	Pear, with skin	Apple, with skin	Blueberries
4.1g	3.4g	2.0g	1.9g	1.8g	2.0g	4.6g	3.3g	1.8g	2.0g

Portion control is often a key factor in why we lose balance with a healthy weight, while each of us will have different requirements depending upon factors such as our lifestyle or how active we normally are in daily life, we can use simple tools such as the **Handy guide to portions** from the British Heart Foundation.



Understanding fats

There are different types of fats and some are essential for good health, hence the name essential fatty acids. These beneficial fats can be found in products such as olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocado and oily fish.

The type of fats that are recommended to be limited in our dietary intake because of their association with poorer health outcomes are saturated and trans-fats.

Foods which are recommended to be limited due to being high in saturated or trans-fats are:

- Biscuits, cakes and pastries
- Deep fried food
- Processed meats e.g. sausages, ham, burgers
- Fatty meats
- Palm oil and coconut oil
- Ghee
- Suet
- Full fat dairy products

Be aware of your salt intake

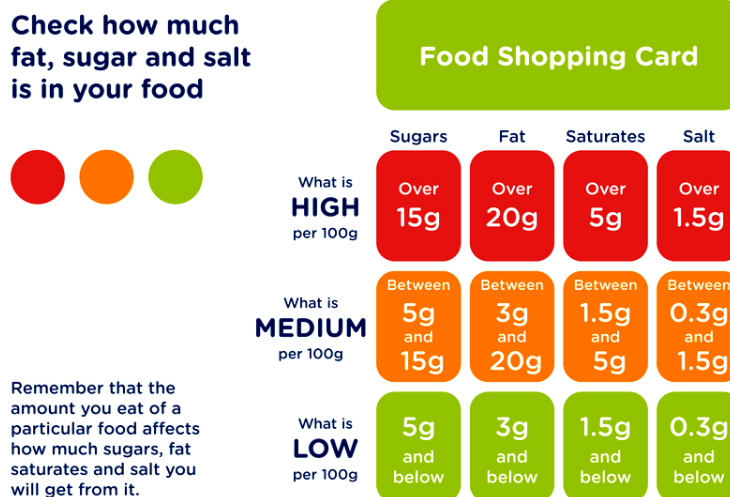
Consuming too much salt can lead to high blood pressure. It is recommended that adults consume no more than 6g per day which is the equivalent of 1 level teaspoon. Use salt sparingly when cooking or adding to food. Be aware of hidden sources of salt in your diet, check the labels and where possible avoid salty foods. Frozen meals and highly processed and packaged foods are often very high in salt.

Be aware of hidden sugar

Be careful of foods with added sugar, such as desserts, soft drinks and those that are marketed as low-fat. Check the labels and be aware of marketing jargon e.g. brown sugar or honey may be marketed as healthier than white sugar but it is still sugar just in another form.

Drink water

Increase your daily water intake by carrying a water bottle with you or pouring yourself a glass of water at every meal. We should aim to drink 6-8 glasses of water a day.



Maintain healthy sleep patterns

Sleep plays a major role in brain health. Getting sufficient and good quality sleep is critical for alertness, mood, daytime functioning and cognition. Although it varies from individual to individual, in general adults require 7 – 8 hours of good quality sleep in a 24-hour period.

Evidence suggests that sleep disturbance can increase the risk of developing depression, cognitive problems and dementia in later life.

Sleep disturbances include:


- Shorter sleep periods
- Frequent waking
- Reduced sleep quality
- Obstructive sleep apnoea

Factors which may impact the quality of sleep can include:

- Medical conditions
- Depression or anxiety
- Substance use
- Medications
- Daily sleep habits
- Breathing problems

With support and lifestyle changes, sleep disturbances can be better managed.





Top tips to improve your sleep patterns

1. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day to set your 'body clock'.
2. Create a relaxing winddown bedtime routine for yourself.
3. Turn off gadgets and electronics such as TVs, phones and tablets ideally two hours before you want to get to sleep.
4. Make sure your bedroom is set up for sleep, be aware of light, noise and temperature. Invest in blackout blinds or an eye mask to reduce light and ear plugs to reduce noise. Find the ideal temperature, not too hot or cold.
5. Resist the urge to take long naps. If you have trouble sleeping you may be tempted to take a nap, while a quick power nap (20 mins) can be beneficial if we really need to sleep if we get into the habit of taking regular naps we can end up then not being able to get to sleep later and thereby continuing the cycle.
6. Stay physically active which can help to regulate our body clock, helping us to fall asleep, increasing sleep quality and reducing night time waking.
7. Don't force sleep. If you can't fall asleep, move to another area of the house for a short time remaining as relaxed as you can with no distractions such as TV, computers or phones, and return to bed when you feel sleepy.

If you have persistent sleep issues seek assistance and advice from your health care professional.

Check your hearing and other senses

Our senses impact the way that we respond to our environment and the people around us. Research is discovering that there maybe a link between hearing loss and our risk of developing cognitive problems later in life. People with mild hearing loss are twice as likely to develop dementia that those with normal hearing, while people with severe hearing loss are five times more likely.

Preventing or minimising hearing loss

- Avoid loud noise
- Wear hearing protection
- Quit smoking
- Have you hearing tested regularly

If you start to notice problems with your hearing at any stage of life you should talk to your GP. Early diagnosis and intervention can help improve your quality of life and reduce risk for dementia.

It is also important to ensure that we get our vision checked regularly as well, particularly as we age when changes in vision are common.



Protect your head

Research has demonstrated that moderate to severe head injuries, or repeated blows to the head, may increase the risk of developing dementia later in life.

The best approach is to protect our head and avoid injury in the first place.

- Always wear a helmet and appropriate safety gear for sports and recreational activities, including motorbiking, cycling and scooting
- Wear a seatbelt while travelling in any motor vehicle

- Obey traffic rules, including not driving after using alcohol or drugs
- Minimise the risk of slips, trips and falls inside and outside the home

Looking after your mind

Keeping the brain active, stimulated and challenged is vital for our cognitive health. Activities which keep our brain mentally and socially engaged can:

- Build brain reserve, so it can cope better and keep functioning properly if any brain cells are damaged or die
- Build the brain's neuroplasticity, through the growth of new brain cells, improved connections between existing cells and support the networks surrounding brain cells.



It is never too late.

Our brain can change and adapt at all stages of life if we provide the challenges to keep it active!

Ways to boost your mental activity

There are lots of ways in which we can create mental stimulation including:

- Reading
- Crossword puzzles
- Getting creative with art
- Craft activities
- Learning a new language
- Learning to play an instrument
- Learn new skills for technology

To name just a few.....

It's important to vary activities and provide new challenges for the brain and do mental activities regularly to stimulate the brain.



Social interaction

Social interaction also supports our wellbeing by providing opportunities to engage with others, reducing isolation and can combat feelings of depression or loneliness.

We can find ways to be social from smiling and saying "hello" to those we meet during our day, to making time for friends and family to catch up in person or via the telephone or joining a group to participate in an activity you enjoy or to learn something new.

Manage your mood

Everyone will experience changes in mood from time to time, however persistent or severe feelings of sadness, or a loss of interest and enjoyment in your usual activities can indicate depression.

Older people often exhibit more physical and behavioural symptoms such as:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Changes in appetite
- Cognitive problems e.g. forgetfulness or poor concentration

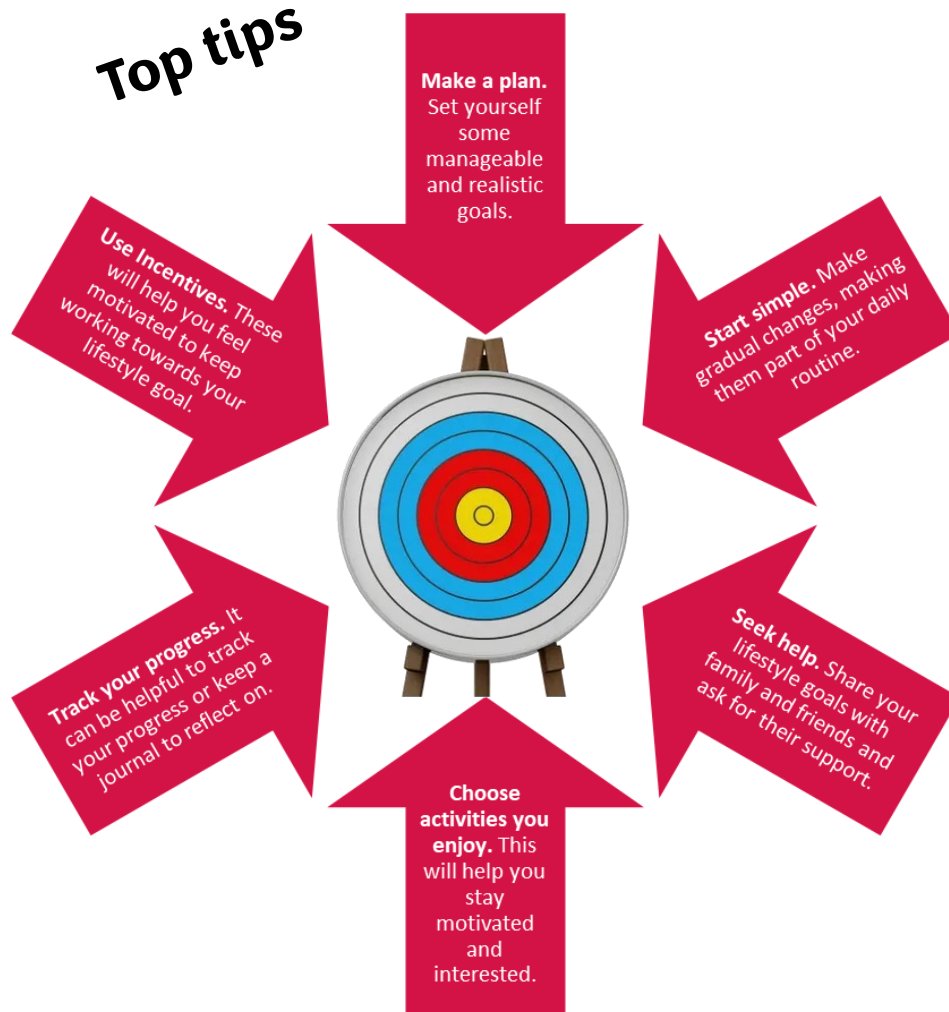
A history of depression is a risk factor for developing dementia in later life. If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, seek help from health professionals for diagnosis, treatment and support. The important thing to remember is that depression is a medical condition and is treatable through psychological intervention, medication or a combination of both.



Creating and maintaining healthy habits

It is never too late to make small lifestyles changes that support your heart, mind and body. They all add up protect your brain health and reduce the risk of developing dementia. The key is to find lifestyle changes that work for you and that you can commit to for better health for brain and body.

Top tips



What to do if you are worried

If you are concerned or have questions about your brain health, there are many resources available to help.

Learn more about the signs and symptoms

There is a lot of information available on the Internet about the signs and symptoms of dementia. For good, well-evidenced information we suggest the following websites:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/about/>

<https://demruk.org/about-dementia/>

<https://www.dementiauk.org/about-dementia/dementia-information/>

Talk to your GP

Visit your GP to talk about any difficulties with memory or thinking. Dementia can only be diagnosed through a comprehensive medical assessment.

Contacts

GP or Healthcare Professional appointments	-	Tel 28000
Community Support Service	-	Tel 28048
Emotional Wellbeing Service	-	Tel 28082
Income Support Service	-	Tel 27296
Social Services	-	Tel 27296
Public Health Unit	-	Tel 28435

Website <https://www.falklands.gov.fk/publichealth/>

Social Media <https://www.facebook.com/FIGPublicHealthUnit>



Front page image credit: Louise Taylor

