

Exercise and Dementia

Dementia is a term for diseases and conditions characterized by a decline in memory, language, problem-solving and other thinking skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia that contributes to 60-70% of cases. There are around 10 million new cases every year. Dementia is one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people worldwide. Based on the signs and symptoms, patients are classified into early, middle and late stage. It imposes physical, psychological, social and economic impact on patients, as well as their caregivers and families.



In Hong Kong



Dementia ranked eighth in the leading causes of death in HK in 2018. The prevalence of dementia among community elders aged 70 or above was 9%, with 15% for female and 9% for male. In 2017-2018, the number of patients aged 65 or above with dementia under psychiatry was about 19,000.

Why Can Exercise Help?



Improved physical fitness for patients with dementia can help them to perform activities of daily living such as to dress, clean and cook, and thus, maintain functional independence for longer. Furthermore, exercise may improve memory and slow down cognitive decline, and provides opportunities for social interaction and improved mood.

Exercise Recommendations

Aerobic Exercise



Staying active on most days of the week is highly recommended



Accumulate 150-300 minutes per week at moderate intensity or 75-150 minutes per week at vigorous intensity



Any type of rhythmic exercise using large muscle groups



Resistance Training



Do resistance training at least two or three times per week



Exercises at a moderate to vigorous intensity with proper progression



Target to finish 2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps of major muscle group exercises



Progress from single joint to multiple joints exercise

A combination of aerobic and resistance training leads to the BEST health outcomes

Tips for Getting Started

- Seated exercises can help build up strength and balance, and are less strenuous than performing exercises in a standing position.
- If you have difficulty maintaining your balance, exercise within reach of a rail or something to grab onto. You can also try exercises in water (Aqua aerobics) which is easier on the joints and require less balance.
- Work out in a safe environment; avoid slippery floors, poor lighting, floor rugs and other potential dangers.

References

- 1) https://www.dh.gov.hk/english/statistics/statistics_hs/files/Health_Statistics_pamphlet_E.pdf
- 2) https://www.elderly.gov.hk/english/common_health_problems/dementia/dementia.html
- 3) <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr19-20/english/panels/hs/papers/hs20200110cb2-468-4-e.pdf>