



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Healthy living

First published: 8 October 2018

Last updated: 9 November 2022

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There's growing evidence that healthy living can not only reduce the risk factors for developing dementia but also have benefits for people with a diagnosis.

Why healthy living is important for people with dementia

While diet, physical exercise and activities that stimulate the brain are not a miracle cure, they can improve quality of life for people with dementia and in some cases slow its progression.

However, it's important to realise that some of the attention-grabbing headlines about dementia are not always based on firm clinical evidence.

Much of the advice is common sense, and as a general rule of thumb, if something is good for our hearts, it's good for our brains.

[View transcript](#)

DementiaGo

EMMA QUAECK:

Co-ordinator of the Exercise Referral Scheme / DementiaGo Project Manager

[00:00:16] The Healthy Communities Department of Gwynedd Council has received an Intermediate Care grant from the Welsh Government and this grant, this money is to ensure that people, as they get older, can stay

independently in the community for as long as they can and that they live well in their communities for as long as possible.

[00:00:38] This also, hopefully, going to reduce the need for health and social care intervention.

[00:00:51] So how are we, as the Leisure Department, going to play our part in this?

[00:00:55] The name of the class is DementiaGo.

[00:00:51] What we decided to do was to create classes in the Leisure Centres for people living with dementia, and also, very importantly, for carers and their family, so that they can do something in their communities, on their doorstep really, take part in activities.

[00:01:15] And now we have staff who are qualified and have had a little bit of experience and training in this field.

CLARE HARRIS:

[00:01:22] Do a little swim, stretch your arms.

EMMA QUAECK:

[00:01:27] They make sure the classes are full of fun but also that they do exercises that help maintain balance, strength, stamina.

CLARE HARRIS:

DementiaGo Physical Activities Champion

[00:01:38] I've had training to teach exercise, exercise classes, for older people.

[00:01:44] I'm also a dementia champion and I run sessions for people with dementia.

[00:01:48] Dementia affects people in lots of different ways and they are all different in themselves, and when exercising, we work hard but we have a lot of fun.

LADY 1:

[00:02:01] Very good, I enjoy myself very much here and look forward to coming here.

[00:02:07] I'd come here every day if I got the chance.

[00:02:10] I really am glad that I'm coming here.

[00:02:14] Especially when you're on your own, it makes a huge amount of difference, doesn't it.

[00:02:18] And I have to say, Wow, to think that we get transport all the way from Porthmadog, and back home, costing nothing, you won't see, there's fun to be had here, isn't there?

MAN 1:

[00:02:30] We all take it nice and light-heartedly, seriously, if you know what I mean, and we enjoy it.

[00:02:40] It sharpened you up a bit, hasn't it?

LADY 2:

[00:02:41] Sharpened me, yes.

[00:02:43] It's brought me out of the doldrums a bit.

MAN 1:

[00:02:45] It loosens you up.

LADY 2:

[00:02:45] It loosens you up, yes.

MAN 1:

[00:02:46] Oh, yes, there's no doubt about that. Because at the age we are, you quickly stiffen up. There's a lot of sort of, can I say, community spirit about it.

[00:02:59] And Clare is absolutely fantastic

LADY 2:

[00:03:02] She is.

MAN 1:

[00:03:03]and so patient.

LADY 2:

[00:03:05] Because they do get some old people here.

MAN 1:

[00:03:09] She really encourages people, doesn't she?

CLARE HARRIS:

[00:03:11] In the classes, there are carers who come with people who have dementia and it's difficult for them all day at home looking after people with dementia.

[00:03:22] When they come to a class here, it's like a little world to them too, to exercise and talk to people who are in the same boat as them, and this is a little bit of a break for them to come here and be able to laugh and just share things with other people.

[00:03:38] There might be a problem at home, and someone else has discovered how to work out a way around this, and, over a cuppa, we all have a chat regarding that and they support each other, like in a little community of their own, and they all support each other and it's fantastic and it's good for them to come here to exercise and keep fit too.

DAUGHTER:

[00:03:59] I think when Mum is here, at the time, she concentrates so much and tries to get everything right.

[00:04:06] That's a good thing because it makes her think.

LADY 3:

[00:04:10] Oh, I like coming, like. I get out of the house, yes, and I see someone else for a *change*, you know.

[00:04:17] Yes, I like doing the *exercises* because I have a bad back so it helps that.

[00:04:23] Once a week isn't enough for you, is it?

MAN 2:

[00:04:26] No.

LADY 3:

[00:04:27] No.

MAN 2:

[00:04:28] I would like to come here every day.

[00:04:31] You come here depressed and then when you go out you're depressed because you have to go from here.

[00:04:39] She's here for you, she's a great girl. I can't say enough about her.

EMMA QUAECK:

[00:04:47] Keeping active, playing sport, doing exercises does us all good – physically and mentally and it is no different for people who have had a diagnosis of dementia.

MAN 3:

[00:05:02] You forget that you actually did play bowls on the local lawn in Dudley.

YR ALA CARER:

[00:05:14] And this gives you the opportunity to give it a go again, doesn't it? It's good, isn't it?

MAN 3:

[00:05:17] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

YR ALA CARER:

[00:05:19] Eh? Yeah, it's good isn't it?

MAN 3:

[00:05:20] Yes.

YR ALA CARER:

[00:05:20] Yeah, it's lovely.

MAN 3:

[00:05:22] It makes me feel young for the second time.

YR ALA CARER:

[00:05:24] I work in the Day Centre at Yr Ala here in Pwllheli and every Wednesday we come to the Leisure Centre to DementiaGo and they seem to be enjoying it very much.

LADY 4:

[00:05:37] I'm in 24 hours a day because of my hip, I'm not allowed out on my own.

[00:05:43] But if I'm out on my own I have a fall, I can't depend on the neighbours. It does help me out a lot, the music, dancing away like a little trooper.

EMMA QUAECK:

[00:05:55] And people think when they get the diagnosis of dementia that they stop, that they can't carry on, that they can't do anything else.

[00:06:02] But I think that by joining classes, it shows that they can do things here, normal things, if you like, and have fun doing them.

CLARE HARRIS:

[00:06:14] When the class finishes and everybody goes out through that door, perhaps some will forget what they've done, perhaps they'll forget who they've seen.

[00:06:24] But what stays with them is the feeling of happiness and well-being, and you can't put a price on that.

End

Health checks

People living with dementia should continue to access local services and have regular checks with their GP.

Health promotion is essential to minimise the risks of complications which may impact on health and well-being and exacerbate the symptoms of dementia.

Problems with vision and hearing can add to the confusion of dementia, so ensure regular appointments.

Also, regular visits to the chiropodist can ensure good foot health. Poor foot care is a cause of falls and will discourage the person from mobilising.

Dental checks to promptly treat or manage problems with teeth, gums or dentures may counter pain or discomfort, difficulties with eating or drinking.

Diet and dementia

A healthy diet is important for overall health.

Some people with dementia may eat too much and gain weight, which may have a knock-on effect on their mobility.

In other cases, people may become undernourished.

This can cause fatigue, confusion, irritability, constipation, muscle weakness and increased risk of infection.

Some problems with eating and drinking are caused by changes in a person's ability to manage the food in their mouth.

They may experience problems with chewing and swallowing. Their tastes may have changed. People often favour sweet foods or may have changes to their appetite.

If you notice any changes, you must refer people for expert advice from speech and language therapists and/or dieticians.

Simple changes may make a big difference, such as changing a person's diet, fortifying food, giving food more often in small quantities.

However we must take expert advice.

[Eating well: supporting older people and older people with dementia practical guide](#)

The importance of exercise

Staying physically active is also important.

You should encourage people to move about in their own home and the wider community.

Physical activities may include structured classes or could be just a gentle walk in the garden.

Choosing an activity that motivates the person is the key, and you should encourage them to do what they've always done to keep fit.

Many leisure centres provide specialist support for older people or people with a disability, free of charge, under the Welsh Government [National Exercise Referral Scheme](#).

Local clubs may run balance and fitness classes, such as [Elderfit](#).

'[Green exercise](#)' appears to have additional benefits to people with dementia.

This means exercising in the open air, perhaps walk in the garden, a run in the park or taking the dog for a walk.

Enjoying it with friends, is better still.

Age Cymru delivers [low impact function training \(LIFT\)](#), a series of activities and games for people over 50.

Useful resources

[A Twitter feed where people can share hints and tips about living with dementia](#)

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Dementia resource for care professionals by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).