Men's Health
PEER EDUCATION

THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
promoting healthy lifestyles for Australia's veterans

THE BRAIN ISSUE

Vol. 12 | No. 3 | November 2013

YOUR BRAIN MATTERS
A GUIDE TO HEALTHY HEARTS & MINDS

Your Brain Matters

Being brain healthy is important at any age, whether you're young or old. Scientific research suggests that living a brain healthy life, particularly during mid-life (generally from 40 to 65 years of age), may reduce a person's risk of developing dementia later in life. To live a brain healthy life, you need to look after your brain, your body, and your heart. They are all important.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Make yourself StrokeSafe

Some of the risk factors for stroke cannot be controlled. These include age, gender and a family history of stroke. However, there are a number of risk factors for stroke you can control to reduce your chance of having a stroke.

I'll have what he's having!

Just as physical exercise is good for keeping us mobile, so mental workouts can help us maintain brain fitness as we grow older. Conventional advice has been about keeping up one's 'interests' and doing mental push-ups with crosswords, Sudoku and the like. We understand this is sensible, but for most of us it is like eating broccoli: virtuous but boring.

The Brain that Changes Itself

For the past 400 years we have thought of the human brain as being machine-like: a hard wired instrument incapable of fundamental change. Well, we've been wrong. We are now learning that the brain can change its own structure and function through thought and activity.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: Memory changes, Cannabis and the brain, Acquired brain injury, Managing neuropathic pain, Meditation: a simple, fast way to reduce stress and much, much more.

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editorial

Naomi Mulcahy
National Coordinator Men's Health Peer Education

Naomi Mulcahy

WELCOME TO THE BRAIN ISSUE

As we get older, the body parts we usually take for granted remind us that it might be time for a tune-up. Usually, it's something like a strained muscle or creaking knee joint. On a recent visit to a shopping centre, I thought my car had been stolen. It was an embarrassing reminder that another body part was ageing. The car was actually parked on the level below.

We know that the brain is the most complex organ in our body and that it controls just about everything we do. It's crucial to our health and wellbeing – physical, mental and emotional. Being "brainy" is only one part of it. Our scientific knowledge of the brain reminds us that we are still discovering its full potential.

Most of us are probably doing "the right things" for brain health. We're watching our diet, exercising, drinking in moderation and occasionally attempting the crossword. What I found interesting when sourcing articles for this issue, were "the other things" we could be doing. How many of us know about the importance of being happy or engaging in social activities and its positive role in brain health?

We have an ageing population and many of us have assisted a relative or family member with memory loss, stroke or dementia. For others, there is the life-time impact of having an acquired brain injury. We can't change our genes (well not yet), but we can live a brain healthy life and protect our brain against injury. Whether you're 25, 50 or 80, how we live will impact on our brain health and we can always do things to improve the functioning of our brain.

VETERANS' HEALTH WEEK 2013

A big thank you to all our MHPE volunteers for their assistance during Veterans' Health Week (VHW) 2013. This year the theme was Physical Activity, and VHW is 'the event' on the MHPE calendar. On page 19 we profile some of the events and activities that were held around the country.

Finally, on behalf of the MHPE Magazine Editorial Committee, thank you for reading the magazine and we hope that you've found the articles throughout the year to be informative, useful and entertaining. We've been advised that Penny and Pushkin are taking a trip away together (incredible, I know) and we're not sure when they'll be Homeward Bound but we'll keep you posted.

Best wishes for a safe, healthy and happy Xmas and New Year.

DEAR EDITOR,

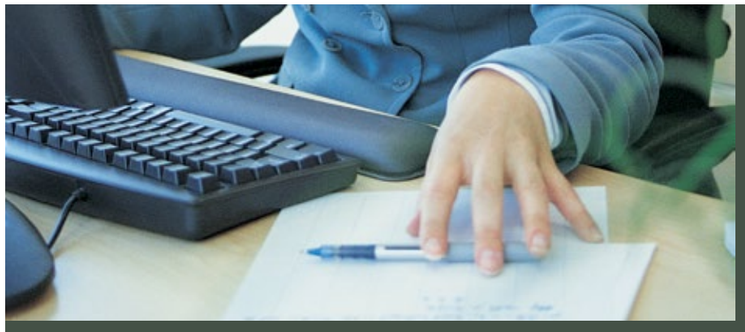
In your July 2013 edition, pages 14 and 15, three Volunteer Representatives shared their twelve week challenge experience. As Volunteer Representatives they have already shown their commitment to Men's Health by taking this leadership role.

They must also be congratulated for "walking the talk" and leading by example in taking on, and completing, this challenge.

A very well done Kathy, Tiny and Laurie! You certainly set an example for the rest of us.

John Macartney
Old Bar

EDITOR'S NOTE: We'll catch-up again with Tiny, Kathy and Laurie in 2014, and we promise to include bigger pictures!



letters to the editor

What we're looking for ...

Letters should be no more than 100 words and relate to articles or topics discussed in the magazine or regarding men's health generally

Please send your letters to The Editor

menshealth@dva.gov.au, or
c/ – Department of Veterans' Affairs
Men's Health Peer Education magazine
GPO Box 9998
Sydney NSW 2001

MHPE MAGAZINE AND REPRODUCTION OF CONTENT

Just a reminder to our readers, if you would like to include an article that's appeared in an edition of the magazine in your own publication, please contact the Editor to confirm if there are any restrictions on the re-publication of the material.

MHPE Magazine Editorial Committee MEMBERSHIP

Naomi Mulcahy DVA (Editor)
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Chris Clarke DVA (outgoing member)
Dr Justin Harding DVA (incoming member)

GUEST COMMITTEE MEMBER FOR THE NOVEMBER 2013 ISSUE

Kathleen Behrendt SA MHPE Volunteer Representative

The Committee would like to thank Chris (AKA Penny/Pushkin) for his support of the MHPE Magazine. In addition to his work on the Committee, Chris has been a regular contributor to the magazine. I would also like to welcome Dr Justin Harding who has joined the Committee for a two-year term.

The Brain

INTRODUCTION

The brain controls and coordinates movements, feelings, thoughts, breathing and bodily functions. It is made up of billions of nerve cells which transmit messages using a combination of electrical and chemical activity. Its soft, jelly-like mass is cushioned inside the skull by cerebrospinal fluid. This fluid circulates around, and through the brain via a series of cavities called ventricles.

The brain is divided into a number of parts, which must work in coordination to achieve the best function.

The cerebral cortex is the largest part of the brain, and is divided into two hemispheres: left and right.

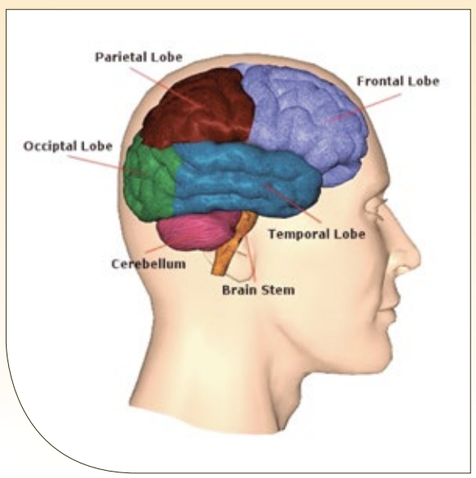
Left and right hemispheres

The left hemisphere is mainly concerned with speech and language (talking, comprehension, reading and writing), maths and logic. The right is mainly concerned with visual perception and the interpretation of nonverbal information, face recognition, music, drawing and spatial analysis. Each hemisphere is divided into four lobes – each with a different set of functions.

Frontal lobes

Frontal lobes are involved in problem-solving, planning, making judgments, abstract thinking and regulating how people act upon their motions and impulses.

The area towards the back of the frontal lobe, called the motor strip, controls movement. In the left hemisphere the motor strip controls movement of the right side of the body while in the right hemisphere the motor strip controls movement of the left side of the body.



Temporal lobes

Temporal lobes are involved in receiving and processing auditory information like music and speech, language comprehension, visual perception, memory and learning, organisation and categorisation of information.

The temporal lobes also contain areas which control personality, emotions and sexual behaviour.

Parietal lobes

The Parietal lobes monitor sensation and body position, as well as allowing us to understand time, recognise objects and judge the position of objects around us.

Occipital lobes

The Occipital lobes receive, integrate and interpret visual information about colour, size, shape and distance.

Cerebellum

The cerebellum controls balance and muscle coordination which is required for smooth and regulated body movement.

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WISDOM AND AGE

The longer we live the more opportunities we have – we learn more about life, meet more people, read and watch more, do more travel and work, participate in more sport, take more risks, do more study, play more games, listen to more music, and have more conversations. This sounds like lots of positive experiences as we age.

But also we experience more losses – physical ability, life partner and friends, work, independence. These may play havoc with our well-being, happiness and resilience.

However, because of our wealth of experiences in life, wisdom really does come with age and ageing can benefit the mind. Many assumptions employers make about older workers must be rethought – wisdom is much more common in the mature population.

So what is wisdom? Definitions cover many themes and concepts. The Oxford English dictionary uses sagacity, common sense, being wise, having experience and knowledge together and applying them critically, to describe wisdom. Other definitions include emotional resiliency, humility, superior judgement, intelligence and problem solving. So with such diverse views of wisdom and its component parts how can it be assessed or is it necessary? Most accept that wisdom is the pinnacle of personhood and it has been written about for millennia.

Erik Erikson, a developmental psychologist of the 20th century regarded as the father of modern life-cycle psychology, posited that looking forward, rather than backward to memories laced with regret and despair, will lead to an authentic old age.

Charles Dickens, writer and observer of English life in the 1800s, said that picking and choosing scenes from our lives gives coherence and meaning in old age and allows us to balance our personal integrity with the inevitable decline in physical health and in the face of death. With this there is growth of wisdom and believable personal histories.

A twentieth century philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, says freedom is what you do with what's been done to you. Man is not the sum of what he has already, but of what he does not yet have and of what he could have. Sartre equates freedom with the attainment of wisdom.

Cervantes of Don Quixote fame said in the 16th Century that "Time ripens all things. No man is born wise". So in his words also, let us live to expect a better future.

Wisdom is what we do with our experiences, how we learn from them, engage with them and let them shape our lives. Wisdom is a positive personal response to our lives, no matter how they are lived. It makes a likely old age enticing and exciting.

So finally, in the words of Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher,

"It is not the young man who should be considered fortunate but the old man who has lived well, because the young man in his prime wanders much by chance, vacillating in his beliefs, while the old man has docked in the harbour, having safeguarded his true happiness."

Dr Jane Fyfield
DVA National Medical Adviser, Health Strategy & Gerontology

"I'll have what he's having!"

"The most revolutionary act you can commit in today's society is to be publicly happy"

Just as physical exercise is good for keeping us mobile, so mental workouts can help us maintain brain fitness as we grow older. Conventional advice has been about keeping up one's 'interests' and doing mental push-ups with crosswords, Sudoku and the like. We understand this is sensible, but for most of us it is like eating broccoli: virtuous but boring.

For some time now neuroscientists, psychologists and such boffins have been presenting evidence for a better way to keep our marbles shiny. The magic answer is HAPPINESS. More explicitly, the activities which light up the "Pleasure" or "Reward" centres in our brains are also helping us to think better for longer.

When we get a real buzz out of something, a chemical called dopamine is released from structures deep in the front-centre of our brain. This switches on a circuit of other brain cells, during which a sheet of tissues called the Ventral Tegmental Area pumps out nitric oxide – a cousin of the old anaesthetic known as "Laughing Gas". Other chemicals such as serotonin and oxytocin start working, and the result is general happiness.

Dopamine release is what makes us feel great or 'rewarded'. The memory of this good feeling is likely to bring us to repeat the activity. When our dopamine levels are healthy we are more alert, aroused and active in "motivational and seeking behaviours" which some of us would recognise as hunting.

But dopamine is not just about having fun. It can also stimulate changes in the way we think – our cognitive functions. Optimal dopamine levels improve our 'working memory' – the complex connections which store the information needed to complete a task; it allows us to plan and to solve problems. We also become more flexible or creative in the solutions we find. People who are in a good (or "positive") mood perform better on standard learning and problem-solving tests than those who are grumpy.

The message is that the 'happy hormones' are good for the thinking parts of our brains too. Sometimes happiness is not easy, even when we live in the best place on Earth at the best time in History. Those who whinge or criticise seem to grab the microphone far too often. Being cheerful is sometimes seen as being naïve or ignorant. The wonderful Dr Patch Adams, the "Clown Doctor" tells us: "The most revolutionary act you can commit in today's society is to be publicly happy".

Not everyone is naturally happy or optimistic, but the evidence is plain: happiness is good for us.

Fortunately there are many things we can do to boost dopamine levels in our brains and keep us happier and smarter for longer. Even more fortunately, nearly all these activities are fun.

Not surprisingly, physical exercise comes high on the list. We know about "runners' high", and the feeling of "well done me" after a good workout, but it does not have to be a championship effort to work. Chocolate is popular – but it needs to be in small doses and must be the DARK stuff, at least 70 per cent cacao. Highly coloured fruits and veges, coffee and resveratrol – the stuff in red wine grapes – are also great for maintaining brain health and good spirits.

Music works a treat, and it should be your kind of music – anything from Brahms to Black Sabbath to bagpipes, as long as it moves you. And there are no dose limits for this one.

The actual process of learning something – especially when it employs techniques such as cognitive therapy, can produce a loop of feeling happier, therefore learning better, then feeling more happy, etc. Smart eh?

Challenging yourself with a new activity is very effective – what about actually playing the music? Keeping up social contacts and conversations keeps the brain chemistry buzzing too. Social contacts? Of course that includes romantic ones, and some sober scientists have shown that a successful romp is like turbo-charging the whole brain.

The list of possibilities is long – truly whatever turns you on.

On the down side, levels of dopamine in the brain may decline with age and be associated with the onset of dementia. But even then, simple processes to make people feel happy and rewarded can significantly improve – at least temporarily – the working memory of elderly people with mild dementia, so that they can better deal with real-world plans and decisions.

Money cannot buy happiness. This is now proven by researchers – increased income brings a different menu of anxieties and unmet needs. However the inverse is also proven. A recent study from the University of Western Sydney showed that people who scored well on a happiness index earned more money. Not a fortune, something like $2000 extra per year, but enough to make you smile.

We all assumed that the lady shouting "Yes! Yes!!" in the classical café scene was up to something raunchy. She was actually enjoying her favourite muesli with a generous serve of blueberries and a mocha, while listening to i-tunes and powering through the crossword.

Cheers!

Dr Tony Ireland
DVA Medical Adviser

MANAGING NEUROPATHIC PAIN: THE M³ APPROACH

Neuropathic pain (sometimes referred to as nerve pain) is a complex condition suffered by many Australians. Living with ongoing pain is a challenge that can impact significantly on your physical and mental health, as well as your social life. Active participation in your pain management is an important part of improving your health. Information on this topic was released as Topic 35 by DVA's Veterans' Medicines Advice & Therapeutics Education Services (Veterans' MATES) program in June 2013.

So what is Neuropathic Pain?

Neuropathic pain develops from damage or injury to the nerves that normally send messages to the brain to signal pain. It is different from the immediate pain that we feel when we damage part of our body e.g. from a cut or a burn. Neuropathic pain is often described as burning, stabbing, shooting aching, or like an electric shock. Early treatment may prevent it from become chronic or ongoing. Common causes of neuropathic pain include shingles and complications of diabetes.

The M3 Approach

The M3 Approach looks at the whole person, not just the part of the body where you may feel the pain. Good pain management involves finding a balance between the following three areas:

MEDICINES, MOVEMENT, MIND

Because neuropathic pain is a complicated condition, it may require the support of a range of health care professionals and a variety of treatments. Working in partnership with your healthcare team can help to make sure that you are involved in the decision-making process about your pain management.

MEDICINES:

UNDERSTANDING YOUR MEDICINES

Neuropathic pain is often difficult to treat. It requires close monitoring and regular review of your medicines to achieve the best results. People respond to medicines in different ways; it may take time to find the best medicine for you. It is important to have ongoing conversations with your doctor about your level of pain relief, how well the medicines are working or any side effects you are concerned about, and any impact on your daily activities.

To achieve good pain management outcomes, your doctor may recommend:

- staying on your current medicine(s)
- changing your medicine
- adjusting the dose of your medicine(s)
- taking a combination of medicines
- having a Home Medicines Review to better understand and manage your medicines.

MOVEMENT:

ESTABLISHING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Living with pain may mean making some adjustments which can take time. However these changes can improve the quality of your life and maintain your physical wellbeing. This can be challenging, but it is possible. It is about finding a balance.

- Stay as fit and active as possible. This will help you remain flexible and strong and keep you moving.
- Make gentle exercise part of your daily routine. Spread your exercise and activities into smaller amounts over a longer time.
- Plan your tasks in small steps instead of all at once, remember to take a break before you need to.
- It is best to build activity slowly.

Pain may lead to disturbed sleep. Talk to your doctor about ways of helping you sleep better. You may also find the Veterans' MATES brochure, '*The myths and facts about sleep*' helpful (Topic 31: Insomnia Management Update).

Leading a healthy lifestyle, eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly will help you stay active and maintain your physical wellbeing.

MIND:

RECOGNISING YOUR EMOTIONS

Acknowledging your pain is the first step towards living with it successfully. It means you are becoming involved in your own pain journey and, with the help of your health care team, better pain management can result. Pain is subjective, only you can feel your pain and many things may affect it. Understanding more about what makes it better or worse and how you react to it can help you feel less worried, more in control and help improve the quality of your life.

Living with a chronic condition such as neuropathic pain can contribute to feelings of fear, sadness and anxiety. Depression is common for those who live with ongoing pain. However, like other illnesses it can be treated. Treatment can help lift depression, which in turn can improve your pain. Talk to your doctor and those around you about how you are feeling.

Relaxation techniques are more than just relaxing. You may experience more pain in times of stress as muscles tighten. Relaxation calms the mind and body, which then calms the pain. Not all relaxation techniques and lifestyle approaches suit everybody, so talk to your doctor and team about what is best for you.

It is amazing how thoughts and feelings can affect your response to ongoing pain. Having a positive outlook, going for a walk, doing some yoga, or catching up with family and friends can keep you in touch and involved.

Ongoing conversations with your doctor are important

Visit your doctor regularly to talk about your pain and understand your medicines. Learn about your condition, its treatment and management so you can make informed decisions and help plan realistic outcomes. Talk with your doctor and other healthcare professionals to get the help you need to live well, in spite of your pain. It may be useful to have your partner, family member or close friend accompany you when you visit the doctor to listen and provide support.

Stay in regular contact with your doctor to talk about your pain, how you are feeling and how you are coping with your daily activities. Your conversation may include:

- The level of pain you are experiencing and how you have been feeling since your last appointment
- Your ability to carry out normal daily activities such as walking, eating, shopping, working or leisure activities
- Being aware of possible side effects from your medicines
- Lifestyle strategies, which together with your medicines, may help you cope with your pain
- Keeping a pain log or diary to provide information about patterns in daily activities which may affect your pain. A Pain Diary can be accessed from NPS MedicineWise at: **www.nps.org.au**
- Be pro-active in the partnership with your doctor and health care team so you set realistic goals and achieve the best outcome. Your doctor can review your progress, help you understand your condition and recommend the best treatment.

To access further information, the following links may be useful:

- About mental health and wellbeing go to: **www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/**
- About living with chronic pain go to: **www.chronicillness.org.au** **www.painmanagement.org.au** **www.painaustralia.org.au** **www.chronicpainaustralia.org.au**

About the DVA Veterans' MATES program go to: www.veteransmates.net.au

A CHAT WITH PENNY

Penny here again, brain on overdrive. Smart fella, your dog. Always up and about looking for things to do. Trotting around, checking everything out, ahead of the game. Walk? Here's the lead! Way to stay young, quick, and bright.

Humans start to slow down way ahead of their time – shuffle round looking half asleep, don't even stand up straight until well after breakfast, look half the day like nothing's going on upstairs. Graeme excepted, of course! He skips around like a Spring lamb, but I've had time to work on him.

Now your cat is practically an item of furniture. Four legs, a bit of ruffled upholstery, all back and bottom. Born with built-in arm rests, likes being by the fire, under tables, next to the window. Still sitting where you last left it.

And not exactly sizzling on the old CAT scan. Most of the lights out, evolutionary regression in progress. Cat couldn't even say "evolutionary regression." Last one we had here got about halfway back to amoeba one day, caught it just in time, had to give it a hell of a fright to bring it back.

But I did bother, kind of fond of them really, hard to say why. I suppose we're their personal trainer, swap boasts about stimulating some kind of brain activity. "Got mine halfway up the curtain from a sleeping start." "No way, really?"

I suppose they keep us going, in a weird kind of way. Humans too. But it is a bit lonely being the only truly intelligent life-form in the universe.

AN AUDIENCE WITH PUSHKIN

Pushkin, Centre of All Consciousness, most beautiful of cats, has noticed you. Has noticed too, through veils of overlapping awareness, the yapping dog. Has descended from the seventh level of meditation to craft a response within your understanding.

Try from a point of stillness, and easier with closed eyes and a relaxed body, to be aware of every sound, every gradation of heat across your skin. Ease, or allow to fade, your small discomforts.

Now your mind can leave you, can perform acrobatics, can calculate complexity, can observe the simple, can return in an instant to be aware of all your senses and interpret them. This is most wakeful intelligence.

This is what the dog sees as sleep, and has to interrupt, to chase round the house without reason, to be everywhere in turns and be nowhere, to be alive and sense nothing, to be alert and devoid of thought.

A dog's brain is in his nose. A cat's brain extends to the tip of each whisker. We patiently show them again, every day. We do bother, kind of fond of them really, hard to say why. But they just don't get it. Movement, company and the next meal.

Humans too. The Fool steps towards the edge of a cliff, a yapping dog at his heels distracting him. In the Tarot of the Cat People, his feline companion issues a warning, but to no avail.

pushkin

Most Beautiful of Cats

Cannabis and the brain

Cannabis (marijuana) is by far the most commonly used illicit drug in Australia; about one third of Australians have used cannabis. Most Australian men aged in their 30s have used cannabis, and *men over 40 are the most likely Australians to be regular, frequent users*. It seems a generation (or two) have continued to smoke 'dope' through their adult lives.

The depressant effects of cannabis

Cannabis, like alcohol, is classified as a depressant drug, meaning it slows the central nervous system and the messages between brain and body. This results in effects such as relaxation, reduced concentration, distorted perception, poorer coordination, slower responses and impaired memory. Long term users have more problems with learning, motivation and employment and heavy cannabis use in teenage years causes long-term changes in brain development.

About one in five recent users report smoking cannabis in the car, similar to the rate admitting driving a car under the influence of alcohol (also a brain depressant). Driving under the influence of cannabis at least doubles the risk of motor vehicle crashes. *87% of recent male cannabis users had consumed alcohol at the same time*. Using cannabis and alcohol together, even at low doses, could have a worse effect on driving than either drug used alone.

Cannabis and mental health

Recent cannabis users are about twice as likely to report high levels of psychological distress and have twice the rate of mental illness diagnosis or treatment compared to non-users in the previous 12 months.

The link between cannabis and common mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety is complex. This is because cannabis is sometimes used to 'self-medicate' symptoms. People who use cannabis have higher levels of depression. Cannabis use can sometimes lead to an episode of psychosis. Evidence suggests that using cannabis may trigger schizophrenia in those who are susceptible.

Assistance and information

The National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) provides the following services:

- A free helpline for cannabis users, their family and friends
- Information and links to treatment centres, clinics and confidential helplines
- Factsheets about cannabis and the law, mental health, potency, driving, dependence and more.

Ph: 1800 30 40 50 and **www.ncpic.org.au**

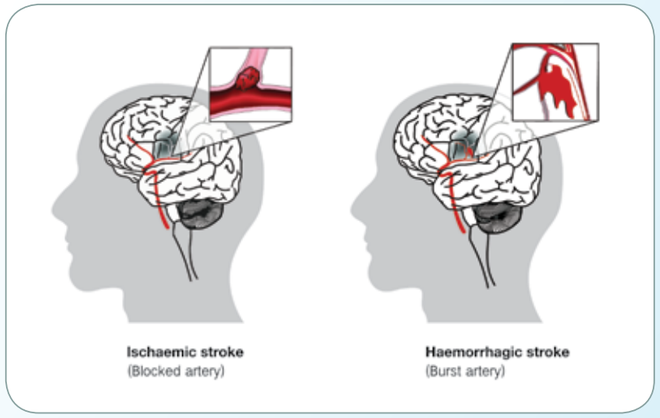
Tony Hoare
DVA National Aged Care Adviser

I'm concerned about a mate who uses cannabis. What can I do?

Like many who misuse alcohol, some men are not ready to stop using. There is, however, an increased use of specialist cannabis treatment services. If you are worried about a mate who has negative effects from cannabis use, wait till the short term effects of cannabis wear off. Express your concern for his health and the effect on those around him. As a friend, you could provide some options:

- remind him about the negative effects of his cannabis use, but acknowledge that he may see no problem
- encourage him to seek help from his GP or VVCS
- suggest he avoids bingeing or using other drugs simultaneously (including alcohol)
- encourage him to avoid driving or activities requiring concentration
- discourage him from using cannabis or any other drug, unless prescribed, if he has a mental illness
- join him in activities that do not involve drug use.

MAKE YOURSELF STROKESAFE



What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted. Blood is carried to the brain by blood vessels called arteries. The picture above shows the different types of stroke. Blood contains oxygen and important nutrients for your brain cells. Blood may be interrupted or stop moving through an artery because the artery is blocked (ischaemic stroke) or bursts (haemorrhagic stroke). When brain cells do not get enough oxygen or nutrients, they die. The area of brain damage is called a cerebral infarct.

Brain cells usually die shortly after the stroke starts. However, some can last a few hours, if the blood supply is not cut off completely. If the blood supply can be returned in the minutes and hours after the stroke, some of these cells may recover. If not, they will also die.

A transient ischaemic attack (TIA) happens when there is a temporary interruption to the blood supply to the brain. It causes the same symptoms as a stroke, but these go away completely within 24 hours.

strokefoundation

Signs of stroke: FAST

A stroke is always a medical emergency

Using the FAST test involves asking three simple questions:

FACE	**Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?**
ARM	**Can they lift both arms?**
SPEECH	**Is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?**
TIME	**Is critical. If you see any of these signs call 000 straight away.**

Facial weakness, arm weakness and difficulty with speech are the most common signs of stroke, but they are not the only signs.

Other signs of stroke may include one, or a combination of:

- **Weakness or numbness or paralysis of the face, arm or leg on either or both sides of the body**
- **Difficulty speaking or understanding**
- **Dizziness, loss of balance or an unexplained fall**
- **Loss of vision, sudden blurring or decreased vision in one or both eyes**
- **Headache, usually severe and abrupt onset or unexplained change in the pattern of headaches**
- **Difficulty swallowing**

The signs of stroke may occur alone or in combination and they can last a few seconds or up to 24 hours and then disappear.

How can I prevent stroke?

Know the risk factors

Some of the risk factors for stroke cannot be controlled. These include age, gender and a family history of stroke.

However, there are a number of risk factors for stroke you can control to reduce your chance of having a stroke.

- **High Blood pressure** is one of the most important known risk factors for stroke. It can lead to a stroke by: causing damage to blood vessel walls, speeding up common forms of heart disease and can cause blood clots to break off artery walls.
- **Smoking** increases blood pressure and reduces oxygen in the blood.
- **High blood cholesterol** contributes to blood vessel disease often leading to a stroke.
- **Diabetes** when left untreated, can cause damage to the circulatory system and increases risk of stroke.
- **Poor diet, inactivity and being overweight.** High body fat and being inactive can contribute to high blood pressure, cholesterol and lead to obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke.
- **Excessive alcohol** can increase blood pressure and increase your risk of stroke.
- **Atrial Fibrillation.** You are more at risk of stroke if you have an irregular pulse due to atrial fibrillation (heart irregularity known as arrhythmia).

The more risk factors you have, the higher your chances of having a stroke. Talk to your doctor about calculating your overall risk of stroke and heart attack.

Myths about stroke

MYTH: Stroke and heart attack are the same.

REALITY: Stroke occurs in and affects the brain. Both of these health problems involve the circulatory system and can be caused by blood clots. Both require emergency treatment. Think of stroke as a brain attack.

MYTH: Stroke is unpreventable. People have no control over it.

REALITY: Early detection and effective control of stroke risk factors can greatly reduce the chances of having a stroke. The good news is that most strokes are preventable.

MYTH: Stroke hits without warning.

REALITY: Many strokes occur after brief episodes of stroke symptoms, also known as transient ischaemic attacks (TIA). These are temporary interruptions of the blood supply to an area of the brain.

MYTH: During stroke, brain cells die immediately, causing instant brain damage.

REALITY: Brain cells don't die all at once during stroke. Cells in the areas directly affected by the blood vessel blockage or breakage begin dying within minutes to a few hours. However brain cells in the area aren't the only ones in danger. Through a process called secondary injury, dying brain cells set off a "chain reaction" of electrical and chemical events. These events endanger, and can kill brain cells in the surrounding area. As a result the stroke survivor may experience more severe disability. These damage processes can potentially be treated if patients present to hospital within three hours of stroke onset.

MYTH: Stroke is not a medical emergency

REALITY: An emergency response to stroke is critical. At the hospital, doctors will confirm the diagnosis of stroke and perform tests – including a CT scan – to determine the size, location and cause. This is important because medical and surgical treatment options will vary depending on whether the stroke resulted from a blocked artery or a haemorrhage bleed. Medication to dissolve a blocked artery must be given within the first 4.5 hours of the stroke. If the stroke symptoms prove to be a TIA, doctors can determine the underlying cause and work with you to prevent a potentially fatal or disabling stroke.

Reprinted with the kind permission of the National Stroke Foundation

National Stroke Foundation of Australia
www.strokefoundation.com.au
Strokeline Ph: 1800 STROKE (787 653)

MEDITATION: A SIMPLE, FAST WAY TO REDUCE STRESS

UNDERSTANDING MEDITATION

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years. Originally it helped deepen understanding of the sacred and mystical forces of life, nowadays, it is commonly used for relaxation and stress reduction.

Meditation is considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine, producing a deep state of relaxation and a tranquil mind. During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

Meditation can give you a sense of calm, peace and balance that benefits both your health and emotional well-being. These benefits don't end when your meditation session ends. Meditation can help carry you more calmly through your day.

The emotional benefits of meditation include:

- **Gaining a new perspective on stressful situations.**
- **Building skills to manage your stress.**
- **Increasing self-awareness.**
- **Focusing on the present.**
- **Reducing negative emotions.**

Meditation also might be useful if you have a medical condition, especially one that may be worsened by stress.

TYPES OF MEDITATION

Meditation is an umbrella term for the many ways to a relaxed state of being. There are many types of meditation and relaxation techniques that share the same goal of achieving inner peace.

Ways to meditate include:

- **GUIDED MEDITATION. Sometimes called guided imagery or visualization, with this method you form mental images of places or situations you find relaxing. You try to use as many senses as possible, such as smells, sights, sounds and textures. You may be led through this process by a guide or teacher.**
- **MANTRA MEDITATION. You silently repeat a calming word, thought or phrase to prevent distracting thoughts.**
- **MINDFULNESS MEDITATION. Being mindful or having an increased awareness and acceptance of living in the present moment. You broaden your conscious awareness. You focus on what you experience during meditation, such as the flow of your breath. You can observe your thoughts and emotions but let them pass without judgment.**
- **QI GONG (CHEE-GUNG). Part of traditional Chinese medicine, it combines meditation, relaxation, physical movement and breathing exercises to restore and maintain balance.**
- **TAI CHI (TIE-CHEE). A form of gentle Chinese martial arts where you perform a self-paced series of postures or movements in a slow, graceful manner while practicing deep breathing.**
- **TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION. You use a mantra, such as a word, sound or phrase repeated silently, to narrow conscious awareness and eliminate thoughts from your mind. You focus exclusively on your mantra to achieve a state of perfect stillness and consciousness.**
- **YOGA. A series of postures and controlled breathing exercises to promote a more flexible body and a calm mind. As you move through poses that require balance and concentration, you focus less on your busy day and more on the moment.**

ELEMENTS OF MEDITATION

Different types of meditation may include different features to help you meditate. These vary depending on whose guidance you follow or who's teaching a class. Some of the most common features in meditation include:

- **FOCUSED ATTENTION. Generally one of the most important elements of meditation, it helps free your mind from the many distractions that cause stress and worry. You focus your attention on a specific object, an image, a mantra, or even your breathing.**
- **RELAXED BREATHING. Involves deep, even-paced breathing using the diaphragm muscle to expand your lungs. This slows breathing, takes in more oxygen, and reduces the use of shoulder, neck and upper chest muscles while breathing so that you breathe more efficiently.**
- **A QUIET SETTING. Practicing meditation may be easier if you're in a quiet spot with few distractions — no television, radios or mobiles. As you get more skilled, you may be able to meditate anywhere, especially in high-stress situations where you benefit the most, such as a traffic jam or a stressful situation.**
- **A COMFORTABLE POSITION. You can practice meditation whether you're sitting, lying down, walking or in other positions or activities. Just try to be comfortable so that you can get the most out of your meditation.**

EVERYDAY WAYS TO PRACTICE MEDITATION

You can make meditation as formal or informal as you like — whatever suits you. Some people build meditation into their daily routine. For example, they may start and end each day meditating.

BUILDING YOUR MEDITATION SKILLS

Meditation takes practice. It's common for your mind to wander during meditation, no matter how long you've been practicing. If you're meditating to calm your mind and your attention wanders, slowly return to the object, sensation or movement you're focusing on.

Experiment and adapt to find the types of meditation you enjoy and what works best for you. Remember, there's no right or wrong way to meditate. What matters is that meditation helps you reduce stress and feel better.

Source: Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article Meditation: A simple, fast way to reduce stress www.mayoclinic.com/health/meditation/HQ01070

ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY

INTRODUCTION

The brain can be damaged by trauma, substance abuse, tumours, interruption of blood supply (strokes) and a large number of other medical conditions.

PREVALENCE

Brain injury is common. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report *Disability in Australia: acquired brain injury (2007)* found 1 in 45 persons had an acquired brain injury (ABI) – about 500,000 people today. Almost three-quarters of these people were younger than 65 years, and more than two-thirds were males. Of those who identified ABI as their principal disability, almost three quarters were males and most suffered their injury before reaching 25 years of age.

CAUSES OF ABI

In young people, trauma is by far the most common reason for ABI causing major functional limitation. Abuse of alcohol and recreational drugs, brain tumours and HIV/AIDS are also important contributing causes. Where ABI is the principal disability, 90 per cent have trauma as the cause, with more than half of these being traffic accidents.

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Traumatic brain injury, or "TBI" is an injury to the brain caused by a blow to the head or by the head being forced to move rapidly forward or backward, usually with some loss of consciousness. This may be the result of a motor vehicle accident, fall, assault, sporting accident, gunshot wound or violent shaking. As a result of this blow or rapid movement, the brain may be torn, stretched, penetrated, bruised or become swollen. Oxygen may not be able to get through to brain cells and there may be bleeding.

ABI AMONG OLDER PEOPLE

Stroke, Parkinson's disease, dementia including Alzheimer's disease, neurodegenerative conditions, alcohol-related brain injury, and falls are all age-related causes of ABI. Very few people aged 65 years or over reported ABI as their principal disability, possibly because they had other significant health conditions that they saw as causing more problems. Therefore, among older people, ABI is usually one of several health conditions associated with disability.

ABOUT BRAIN INJURY

ABI is a complex and individual condition and is distinct from intellectual disability. People with a brain injury may have difficulty controlling, coordinating and communicating their thoughts and actions but generally retain their intellectual abilities.

Brain injury has dramatically different effects on different people. The brain controls every part of our being: physically, intellectually and emotionally. When the brain is damaged, some other part of ourselves will also be affected. Even a mild injury can result in a serious disability that will interfere with a person's daily functioning and personal activities, often for the rest of their life. While the outcome of the injury depends largely on the nature and severity of the injury itself, appropriate treatment plays a vital role in the level of recovery.

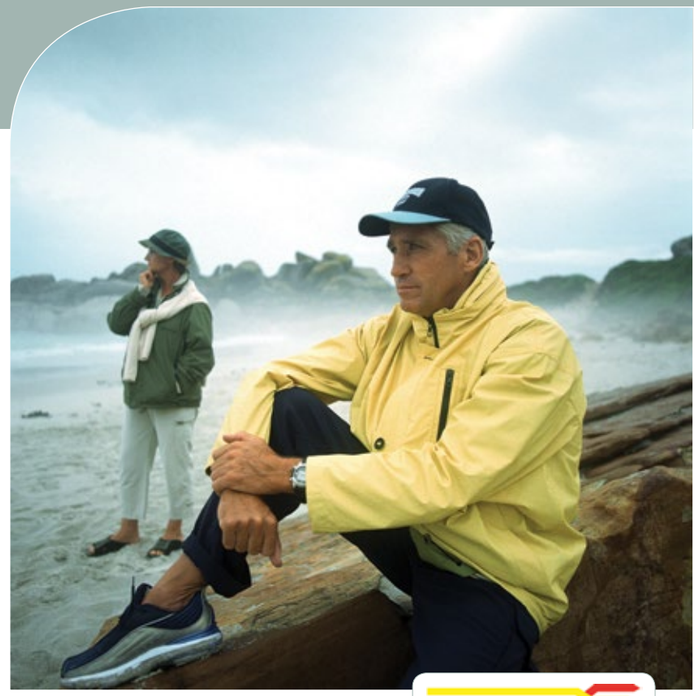
THE IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL

There is little understanding in the community about brain injury and the impact it can have on individuals. Long term effects are difficult to predict and will be different for each person. It is common for people with a brain injury to get tired more quickly, have difficulty with short-term memory and find it more difficult to concentrate and to remember information.

There are five areas in which people with ABI may experience long-term changes:

- **Medical difficulties**
- **Changes in physical and sensory abilities**
- **Changes in the ability to think and learn (cognition)**
- **Changes in behaviour and personality (psychological)**
- **Communication difficulties.**

How serious these changes are, such as a person becoming more impulsive or getting lost easily, may only become clear over time.



brain injury AUSTRALIA
www.braininjuryaustralia.org.au

THE IMPACT ON THE FAMILY

The significant changes in personality and behaviour of a person with a brain injury can be difficult for families to cope with. This has been described as the 'ripple' or 'domino' effect on the family after the injury where other family members experience their own adjustment difficulties. It can be hard for those not immediately affected to understand what a person with acquired brain injury and their family is going through. Family members often cope with the person's injury in different ways and some may not even acknowledge that the injury exists.

Carers often find they have to support family members in addition to the person with an injury. This can mean that it is harder for carers to deal with their own grief and personal needs. Carers may also be challenged by other family members about the care they are providing. Combined with the demands of caring for a person with a brain injury this can result in carers suffering chronic stress.

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Brain Injury Australia
www.braininjuryaustralia.org.au
Ph: 1800 BRAIN1 (1800 272 461)

At Ease Mental Health Portal:
EASIER ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION

If you are looking for mental health advice and support, DVA has done the hard work for you by making it easier to locate the resources you need. Just go online to the At Ease mental health portal at **www.at-ease.dva.gov.au**

You can access four websites via the portal, depending on what you need:

- **AT EASE:** *Serving and ex-Serving Members and their Families.*
  This site helps in the recognition of the symptoms of poor mental health, with self-help tools and advice, access to professional support and information about treatment options. Families can find advice on how to keep healthy while caring for someone with a mental health condition.
- **WELLBEING TOOLBOX**
  This interactive website has tools to help you with problem solving, building support, helpful thinking, getting active, keeping calm and sleeping better.
- **THE RIGHT MIX**
  Provides advice on how you can get the 'right balance' with alcohol, diet and exercise to achieve a healthier and more enjoyable lifestyle.
- **OPERATION LIFE ONLINE**
  Helps you recognise when a mate or family member may be thinking of suicide, and how you can help them by learning about risk factors, warning signs and how to have a conversation about suicide. The site also offers useful contacts and resources, case study videos and a comprehensive quiz.

The portal also provides access to a series of mental health-related videos and apps for smart phones and other mobile devices.

- **YOUTUBE VIDEOS:** 'Don't suffer in silence' is the key message in a series of online videos about the impact of mental ill health on serving and ex-serving members and their families. The videos are available via At Ease or YouTube at **www.youtube.com/DVAAus**
- **PTSD COACH AUSTRALIA:** A self-help smart phone app to help users understand and manage the symptoms that may occur following exposure to trauma. The app provides education about PTSD, information about self assessment and professional care, and tools to manage the stresses of daily life with PTSD.
- **ON TRACK WITH THE RIGHT MIX:** A self-help smart phone app to help users manage their alcohol consumption. Users can track the number and types of drinks consumed and the amount of money spent, and review the impact this has on their wellbeing and fitness.

All of the above apps are free and downloadable from both the App Store (iOS) and Google Play (Android).

New technology has the potential to expand our support for people with mental health issues in ways inconceivable just a few years ago—and that can only help reduce the stigma of seeking help.

Of course, online information and mobile resources are only a first step. If you need help:

- call the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) 24/7 on **1800 011 046.** The VVCS provides individual counselling and group programs to eligible serving and ex-serving members and their families, peacekeepers and their families. It is a specialised, free and confidential, Australia-wide service;
- see your GP; or in
- an emergency, call 000.

EXERCISE
the Key to Healthy Living - Veterans' Health Week

The SA Aquatic and Leisure Centre held a Wild and Wet VHW Activity for members of the Vietnam Veterans' Federation and their families. Members took part in a range of physical activities such as swimming, aqua aerobics and gym sessions.

Across the country, people of all ages were encouraged to improve their health and wellbeing by increasing their levels of physical activity during Veterans' Health Week 2013.

Record numbers took part in the week, with over 14,000 people attending 193 events across Australia.

The events provided participants with the opportunity to take part in a wide variety of sports and activities suitable to all different ability levels, with participants reminded that even the smallest amount of activity can make a big difference to your health.

This year, Veterans' Health Week was launched in Melbourne at the 'Be Aware and Get Your Groove On' event with involvement from Alzheimer's Australia, who announced the release of a new help sheet they have developed in collaboration with Fitness Australia and DVA.

The help sheet: Physical Activity for Brain Health and Fighting Dementia outlines how physical activity can help people to maximise their brain health including what types and how much exercise is best. To view a copy of the help sheet and other useful information visit: **www.yourbrainmatters.org.au**.

Many outstanding events were held around the country, with feature events including:

- **Northern Territory: A guided walk around the Darwin Military Museum and a healthy activities day with a barefoot bowls challenge at the North Darwin RSL Club.**
- **New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory: 'Vet's Go Surfing' free surfing lessons for the veteran community run by the North Bondi RSL Sub-Branch.**
- **Queensland: Dragon boat racing at the Currumbin RSL and a Stomp on the Strand in Townsville.**
- **Tasmania: Home and community gardens workshop with Peter Cundall in Hobart as well as a family fishing day at Craigbourne Dam.**
- **Western Australia: Spring Time Tea Dance at Anzac House, the annual Long Tan Remembrance Day Golf Challenge and The Great Walk along Meelup Walk Trail at Cape Naturaliste.**
- **South Australia: Physical Activity Expo and Family Fun Day with 20+ stalls, two bands, numerous displays, free food and numerous activities.**

DVA would like to extend our gratitude to all event organisers who helped to make the week a success including ex-service and community organisations, MHPE volunteers and DVA staff. All groups worked hard to deliver their events with excellent results.

As 2013 comes to a close, it is time to start thinking about events for next year that embrace the 2014 theme of Nutrition. The Veterans' Health Week team will be in touch with MHPE volunteers in early 2014 to start organising events. To discuss anything Veterans' Health Week related contact DVA on 133 254 (or 1800 555 254 from regional Australia), email **vhw@dva.gov.au** or visit our webpage at **www.dva.gov.au/vhw.htm**

Dimitri Batras, National Health Promotion Adviser and Jeff Fairweather, Assistant Director Social Health Policy

FIGHT ALZHEIMER'S SAVE AUSTRALIA
FIGHTDEMENTIA.ORG.AU

MEMORY CHANGES

There is a difference between memory changes that happen as a part of normal ageing and memory changes that can occur as a symptom of dementia.

One of the main symptoms of dementia is memory loss. We all forget things from time to time, but the loss of memory with dementia is very different. It is persistent and progressive, not just occasional. It may affect the ability to continue to work, or carry out familiar tasks. It may mean having difficulty finding the way home. Eventually it may mean forgetting how to dress or how to bathe. An example of normal forgetfulness is walking into the kitchen and forgetting what you went in there for, or misplacing the car keys. A person with dementia however, may lose the car keys and then forget what they are used for.

Key points about normal forgetfulness

- As we get older, some of the most common changes that we complain about are to do with memory. However, memory changes that happen as part of normal, healthy ageing usually don't interfere with everyday life in a dramatic way.
- Everyone is different, and the effect of getting older on memory is different for each person.
- Age-related changes in memory aren't only negative! While we may become a little more forgetful, find it harder to remember long numbers, or take a little longer to learn new skills, other aspects of memory including our experience, general knowledge, and wisdom usually continue to improve throughout life, right into very old age.
- Research also suggests that immediate memory and lifetime memory do not change as we get older.
- Based on *Remembering Well*, by Delys Sergeant and Anne Unkenstein

Debunking memory myths

MYTH ONE
Forgetfulness is a sign that something is wrong with your brain.

FACT
If we didn't possess the capacity to forget we'd all go crazy. The ability to remember what is important and discard the rest is a skill to be treasured.

MYTH TWO
You lose 10,000 brain cells a day, and one day you just run out.

FACT
This is an exaggerated fear. Some parts of the brain do lose nerve cells, but not where the process of thinking takes place. You lose some nerve connections, but it's possible to grow new ones, or maintain the connections you have, by exercising your mind.

MYTH THREE
Compare yourself to others to tell if your memory is normal.

FACT
A huge range of ability exists across the general population. Even a single individual experiences variations in memory over the course of a lifetime. Just as certain people have a talent for music and others do not, some of us are naturally gifted at various types of remembering.

From Memory: Remembering and forgetting in everyday life, by Dr Barry Gordon.

Tips for keeping your memory sharp

As yet, there is no way to prevent or cure dementia. However, there are things that everybody can do to dramatically reduce their risk of developing the disease, including a healthy diet, regular physical exercise, and an active and varied social and mental life.

Here are a few tips for keeping your brain fit and your memory sharp:

Look after your heart

- **Avoid harmful substances. Smoking, excessive drinking and drug abuse damages brain cells**
- **Have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked regularly**
- **If you're over 45, get regular heart and stroke risk assessments**

Be physically active

- **Exercise regularly. Physical exercise increases blood flow to the brain, and stimulates growth and connections between brain cells. Regular exercise is also associated with a lower risk of dementia**

Mentally challenge your brain

- **Challenge yourself. Reading widely, keeping mentally active and learning new skills strengthens brain connections and promotes new ones**

Eat for Health

- **Eat a well balanced diet including plenty of fruit and vegetables, and omega 3 fatty acids from oily fish and foods such as walnuts**
- **Reduce consumption of sugars and saturated fats**
- **Drink alcohol in moderation**

Enjoy social activity

- **Spend time with friends and family doing things you enjoy. Social activity is one of the best ways to keep the brain active and memory sharp**
- **Social activity is also associated with a reduced risk of dementia**

Use memory strategies

- **Pay attention. Concentrate on what you want to remember**
- **Minimise and resist distractions**
- **Use memory aides, such as a notepad, or a diary. This may not keep your memory sharp, but does compensate for any memory lapses**
- **Take your time**
- **Organise belongings. Use a special place for unforgettables such as car keys and glasses**
- **Repeat names of new acquaintances in conversation**

From Your Brain Matters; Alzheimer's Australia's national dementia risk reduction program: ***www.yourbrainmatters.org.au***

Distinguishing between normal memory changes and dementia

DESCRIPTION	PERSON WITH DEMENTIA	OLDER PERSON
Events	**May forget part or all of an event**	**Memory may sometimes be vague**
Words or names for things or objects	**Progressively forgets**	**Sometimes may forget.** **Words or names are on the 'tip of the tongue'**
Stored knowledge	**Over time loses known information such as historical or political information**	**Although recall may be slower, information is essentially retained**
Everyday skills such as dressing and cooking	**Progressively loses capacity to perform tasks**	**Retains ability, unless physically impaired**

For more information contact Alzheimer's Australia **www.fightdementia.org.au**
National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

MANAGING YOUR HEALTHCARE INFORMATION

Have you considered the convenience and other benefits of having a personally controlled eHealth record? Gone are the days of having to remember your medications and medical history or telling your story to every new doctor you see.

What's in it for me?

An eHealth record is a secure electronic summary of your important health information. You control what goes into it and who can access your eHealth record. An eHealth record is a quick easy way for you to manage your healthcare information and will help you and your healthcare providers to better coordinate your care.

Your key health information can be accessed anywhere and any time, for example, in an emergency or when you are travelling, so you will not need to remember or repeat your medical history or your medications.

Benefits for you include:

- **BETTER INFORMED DECISIONS** With your permission the healthcare professionals involved in your care will be able to quickly view a summary of your information, helping them to make the best possible decisions about your care.
- **FASTER** The doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals treating you won't have to spend time searching for past treatment information.
- **SAFER** In an emergency, healthcare professionals can quickly and easily view your important health information, including any allergies and vaccinations as well as the treatment you have received.
- **EASIER** You won't have to remember the results of tests you've had, or all the medications you have been prescribed.
- **SHARING THE LOAD** If you have a carer, you can give permission for them to access your eHealth record to assist you to manage your healthcare.

The Personally Controlled eHealth Record System

What information is in my eHealth record?

Your eHealth record will grow over time to contain a shared health summary of your most important health care events, such as hospital stays, medications prescribed and dispensed, visits to the GP, or medical tests.

When you set up your eHealth record, you can choose whether you want information that is already on your Medicare records to be added, including information related to healthcare services provided under DVA's arrangements. You can add your personal details and notes about your health, including the location of your Advanced Care Directive if you have one, and your organ donor registration details.

How do I register?

Registering is voluntary and safe – no one can access your eHealth record without your permission unless it is an emergency, and then only in very specific circumstances for a limited time.

Talk to your doctor about registering for your eHealth record. If your GP is already participating, they can offer you assisted registration when you are in their practice. If your GP isn't yet set up to offer assisted registration you can register for your eHealth record by calling the Department of Human Services (DHS) Helpline on 1800 723 471, where you will be asked a series of questions to establish your identity.

Your registration will be confirmed to you via email or text message. Included with the confirmation of registration message you receive will be an Identity Verification Code generated by DHS. This code is used the first time you go online to access your eHealth record. To find out more about eHealth visit **www.ehealth.gov.au.**

SMARTER THAN THE AVERAGE BEAR

Yogi was the bear we all wanted to be – the smart one. Over half a surveyed human sample will think they are above average intelligence. Well, who thinks they aren't?

I did an IQ test once, for an occupational aptitude assessment. I'm not sure how they graded the occupations. Do you really want your bus driver, or the waiter or shop assistant, to be towards the wrong end of the scale? Think about it. We might hope our surgeon is at the right end, but when I worked in an operating theatre, watching men in gloves suturing an incision, I wished they'd used a different aptitude set and called in my mother.

Everyone else, of course, is stupid. Boys up to a certain age think girls are stupid. Then one amazing day who cares? Girls up to a greater age know that boys are stupid. Their life quest is then to work out how they still get to be in charge of everything.

People assume superiority over pets. But who cleans up whose mess? And when my cat gives me that "How did I end up with HIM?" look, I feel like an amoeba.

Every village, town and country thinks the people in the next one are stupid, and have the same jokes about it, all over the world. I worked in the north Italian mountains where villages facing each other across valleys had the identical joke about the other.

After thinking myself a pretty smart cookie in the office, a day as a rookie deck hand on a three-masted barque overturned my assumptions about intelligence, and other abilities. Many of the crew scrambling up rigging and hauling ropes were over seventy. I still don't understand how a 'little old lady' can pull harder.

Then there was 'practical intelligence' that works faster than thought. Sailing decks are dangerous, and when a block the size of a car engine came loose and swung towards the heads of crew on the other side, my elderly companion had spotted it, worked out what to do and done it while I was still registering the movement.

One respected crew member was unable to find regular employment because of a brain injury from a car accident. He had been passing the ship, unused to being considered fit for anything, and they had invited him up. He was now a deck officer. Whatever he was supposed to have trouble with (simultaneous equations?) I did not discover that afternoon, but he acted as though he could sense every moving part of the ship, and control it with instant and clear commands.

Is our world valuing only limited forms of intelligence?

Oh yes, my IQ test revealed that I am of average intelligence. This was a great relief. Up until then I had been haunted by the fear that I was an underachieving genius – perhaps a common illusion from late adolescence. Now I can be proud of everything I have achieved with moderate resources. I have been asked would you rather be an overachieving idiot? Every time!

Chris Clarke

KEEPING YOUR MIND ACTIVE

Challenging your brain with puzzles and games can keep your brain active and improve its physiological functioning. Since this issue is all about the brain, we've expanded this section to give your grey matter a mental workout.

NUMBER BLOCK

A number block is group of numbers formed in a block. The numbers in each row add up to the totals to the right. The numbers in each column add up to the totals along the bottom. The diagonal lines also add up the totals to the right. Some of the numbers are missing. You fill in the missing numbers. The missing numbers are integers (no negative numbers or fractions) between 0 and 10.

								48
1	5			4	5	6	10	41
	4	5	1	4	2	3	2	27
6	7	9	5	1	1	3		40
10		7		10	7	2	8	57
	6	5	8	1		2	2	32
	0	6	0	9	3	10		33
10	8	6			6	9	2	47
2	5	1	2	9	2	10	8	39
40	45	49	25	38	32	45	42	38

HINK PINKS

Hink Pinks are fun rhyming word riddles. The answer to the riddle is a pair of words that rhyme with each other. For example: Large Feline would be Fat Cat.

1. Luggage label _____	6. Farm animal vessel _____
2. Sofa slump _____	7. Intelligent dessert _____
3. Unrefined young guy _____	8. Obese cap _____
4. Despair chamber _____	9. Salary madness _____
5. A tired nerd _____	10. Vibrant bee home _____

WORD CHANGE

Can you morph one word into another by just changing one letter at a time?

pouch	hole	must	last	wood
peace	comb			
		dune	moon	sand

COMMONYMS

A commonym is a group of words that have a common trait in the three words/ items listed. For example the items: car, tree, elephant – they all have trunks.

1. FURNITURE - MOUSTACHES - SKIS
2. GOLF COURSE - A COFFEE SHOP - A QUART
3. HE - SHE - THEY
4. JUPITER - ALASKA - THE BLUE WHALE
5. WOOD TICK - LEECH - MOSQUITO
6. YAWNING - LAUGHTER - INFLUENZA
7. IMPROPER - UNIT - MIXED
8. MARIGOLD - MUSTARD - CANARY
9. SNAKE - CAVITY - BOTTOMLESS
10. KIDNEY - STRING - BLACK

MUMBO JUMBO

A mumbo jumbo is a list of words/hints that you have to unscramble.

Copy the letters in the numbered cells to other cells with the same number.

JAARN

4

AOKER

10 1

PISILNELPIH

11 5 12 2

NATMEIV

3 9 8

MOADACBI

6 7

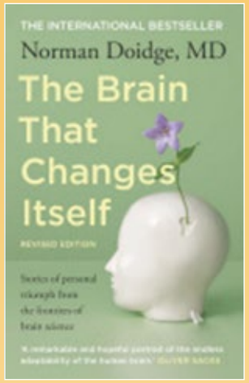
						U						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	2

Answers on page 31

Source:
www.wuzzlesandpuzzles.com

BOOK REVIEW

THE BRAIN THAT CHANGES ITSELF: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science



BY NORMAN DOIDGE, MD

For the past 400 years we have thought of the human brain as being machine-like: a hard wired instrument incapable of fundamental change. Well, we've been wrong!
We are now learning that the brain can change its own structure and function through thought and activity. This sentence is possibly the most important shift in our view of the brain since we first sketched out its basic anatomy and it is a major paradigm shift.

Neuroplasticity is the term used throughout the book, *The Brain that Changes Itself,* to describe the brain's natural ability to reorganise itself by forming new neural pathways and connections throughout life from childhood to old age.
Author, psychiatrist and researcher Norman Doidge, MD, travels around the United States to meet scientists and doctors who have been working with people with significant brain limitations; from stroke patients learning to speak again, to the remarkable case of a woman born with half a brain that rewired itself to work as a whole.

The book features numerous case studies of patients suffering from neurological disorders, and details how in each case the brain adapts to compensate for the disabilities of the individual patients, often in unusual and unexpected ways. Interviews with the patients, clinicians, and research scientists involved in these studies make up a large portion of the contents.

Doidge shows that the brain is adaptive and thus plastic, rendering it not only more resourceful, but also more vulnerable to outside influences. He teaches that our brains are plastic and that this is neither good nor bad...it just is! Our brain's plasticity enables us to relearn lost abilities after road trauma or stroke. That same plasticity also enables totalitarian regimes such as North Korea, to mold the thinking of an entire population!

Doidge approaches scientists and patients alike, with an open-hearted compassion which enables us to identify with some of the remarkable transformations his subjects have achieved, often through years of intelligent and persistent hard work and dedication.

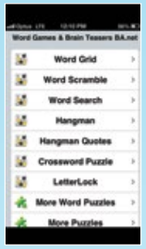
This book offers a sense of optimism and hope to all those who are living with conditions such as PTSD, Depression, Anxiety and Traumatic Brain Injury.

The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science by Norman Doidge, MD (2007), and an hour long DVD of the book, can be ordered online from most bookstore websites.

Maryanne McKay, DVA

Health Technology

It's not hard to think that some apps are possibly reducing our brain activity and capacity, replacing critical thinking or problem solving with the touch of a button. But I think that's just one side of the coin. The advent of mobile devices and apps now provides us with the opportunity to do many things 'on the run', or in any location. The following are just a small selection of apps that you can download to help keep your brain stimulated. Enjoy!



WORDGAMES & BRAIN TEASERS (FREE)

Love word games? This is ideal for you and it's an easy and carefree way to keep your brain active and to have fun at the same time. This app contains a series of word grid, scramble and search games, anagrams, hangman, hangman quotes and crossword puzzle games that will keep you (and your brain) busy for hours.

LEFT VS RIGHT: A BRAIN GAME (FREE)

Here's a great app that will exercise both your left and right sides of the brain at the same time. Simply match written colours and perceived colours to earn a 'Perfect Star'. There are eight 'packs' of games, each containing a number of games to test your skills. It sounds easy, but I can guarantee it will trip you up if you're not careful.

BRAIN BUST – TRAIN YOUR MIND (FREE)

Play a series of brain games against your friends, or if you're not that confident, play solo. There are multiple simple games, where you can adjust your difficulty level, challenge others and then display your results (to boast to your friends, of course). Choose from 'fast numbers', '24 twister', 'math wiz', 'memory mix' and 'image blaster' games.

SUDOKU FREE! (FREE)

The classic game of sudoku has always been a great way to stimulate the grey matter, and now you can enjoy it on your mobile device. This version has 100 free puzzles (or the option of purchasing others or earning them through credits). Sudoku Free! has auto-notes and hints to help you master the games, plus error checking and smart notes. What else do you need to get your brain active?!

WORD JIGSAW (FREE)

This app is addictive (but in a good way!). A grid of words has been broken into pieces, and each line in the grid contains a single word. All you have to do is reassemble the puzzle to find all the words. 'Easy you say!' but I can assure you that looks are deceiving, and it will keep your brain lively and the free version has three levels, with the option to buy more levels.

John Hall, DVA

SPIDERS' WEBS AND BOOKWORMS

For the bookshelf or eBook reader

BRAIN FOOD
Dr Karl Kruszelnicki 2012

Dr Kruszelnicki places the food we eat and the food industry under the microscope, sheds light on food fads and provides advice on foods that lead to brain-boosting goodness. $19.99

BRAIN INJURY SURVIVAL KIT : 365 Tips, Tools & Tricks to Deal with Cognitive Function Loss
Cheryle Sullivan 2008

Provides brain injury survivors, their families and loved ones with strategies to help improve brain function and quality of life. The book offers tips, techniques, and life-task shortcuts with approaches to compensate for impaired memory function; locating things that have been put away; word finding; concentration exercises and communication tools. $22.95

HEALING THE ANGRY BRAIN
Ronald Potter-Efron 2012

Strong, sudden outbursts of anger can have an enormous impact on your life. These anger pathways in the brain can eventually disrupt work, strain relationships, and possibly damage your health. This book can help you short-circuit the anger cycle and learn to cope with stressful interactions. Learn how to take control of your emotions by rewiring your brain for greater patience and perspective. $22.95

MAINTAIN YOUR BRAIN : The latest medical thinking on what you can do to avoid dementia
Dr Michael J Valenzuela 2011

Shows you practical steps to avoid dementia and improve the overall health of your mind and body. Dementia expert Dr Michael Valenzuela addresses questions people have about dementia, and explains complex cutting-edge medical discoveries in a way that is clear and easy to understand. His advice covers everything from blood pressure, diet and cholesterol to mental activity and physical exercise. $27.99

MAKE YOUR BRAIN WORK
Amy Brann 2013

Provides practical guidance to be more effective at work by using the latest insights from neuroscience. Brann explains how to leave stress, negative moods and poor time management behind and learn the habits and techniques you want by making your brain work for you. $32.99

MINDSIGHT – CHANGE YOUR BRAIN AND CHANGE YOUR LIFE
Daniel J Siegel 2011

Explores how your capacity for insight and empathy allows you to make positive changes in your brain and life. Dr Siegel coined the term 'mindsight' to describe the innovative integration of brain science with the practice of psychotherapy. He demonstrates how mindsight can alleviate a range of psychological and interpersonal problems. He also shows us how to observe the working of our minds and how, by following the proper steps, we can change the wiring and architecture of our brains. $24.99

THE YELLOW ELEPHANT : Improve Your Memory to Learn More, Faster, Better
Tanzel Ali 2013

Demonstrates how four simple memory techniques can train your brain for better recall and be applied for success in education, study and general brain health. Practical exercises demonstrate how the techniques work and build your memory skills quickly. $19.99

DVA's Living with Dementia

*P*rovides information to enhance understanding and assist in making well-informed decisions about the future. The handy tips will help those with dementia, including those with younger-onset dementia, and carers, manage the condition and maximise quality of life. This book contains information on services, organisations and publications. Downloadable at:
www.dva.gov.au/aboutDVA/publications/Pages/index.aspx

DVA's Planning Ahead Kit

A publication designed to help veterans and their families prepare for bereavement with information and checklists to help ensure that important information is available to families when it is needed. Downloadable at:
www.dva.gov.au/aboutDVA/publications/Pages/index.aspx

DVDS

Brain fitness : the Program Volumes 1-4 (DVD)

This program is based on the concepts of neuroplasticity – the ability of the brain to change and adapt and even rewire itself! Shows that by presenting the brain with the proper stimuli, scientists can drive beneficial physical and functional change. It also challenges the notion that we are pre-programmed to inevitable decline in later life showing that high levels of mental activity can help in all areas of life. Available from the ABC Shop and other online stores. $24.99 each

WEBSITES

Your Brain Matters

Alzheimer's Australia's brain health program that guides you on how to look after your brain health. It is based on scientific evidence that a number of health and lifestyle factors are associated with brain function and the risk of developing dementia.
www.yourbrainmatters.org.au/brain-health-program

BrainLink

A Victorian based service that is dedicated to improving the quality of life of people affected by acquired disorders of the brain. The service responds immediately to the needs of families and friends of those who are living with an acquired brain disorder.
www.brainlink.org.au/

Brain Foundation

A nationally registered charity dedicated to funding world-class research Australia-wide into neurological disorders, brain disease and brain injuries. One initiative, the Healthy Brain Program, assists Australians to keep their brains healthy into old age, through the provision of community education and research. **www.brainfoundation.org.au/**

The Brain Food Factory

Produces a FREE online monthly e-magazine to keep those brain cells working. Sudoku, Random Factoids, Crossword Craziness, Completely Coded, Mindnumbing Mazes, Anagram Antics, Wacky Words, 5 Question Quickie Quizzes, Word Searches, a dedicated children's section and much more.
www.brainfoodfactory.com/index.html

Finally, there are many websites providing online brain exercise programs. Do a Google search for left / right brain exercises.

Sourced by Jo Wagner, DVA Librarian

VVCS is a free and confidential service that provides nation-wide counselling, group treatment programs and support to members of Australia's veteran and Defence community.

VVCS can provide a wide range of support and treatments for war and service-related mental health conditions, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression and anger, as well as providing support for lifestyle and family matters that can be unique to the military lifestyle.

VVCS counsellors are qualified psychologists and social workers who maintain an understanding of military culture, enabling them to deliver tailored services.

SERVICES INCLUDE:

- **Individual, couple and family counselling;**
- **Group treatment programs to address anger, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance and a range of lifestyle and relationship issues (detailed below);**
- **after-hours telephone crisis support through Veterans Line (1800 011 046); and**
- **Support with the transition from military to civilian life.**

VVCS services are available for all Australian veterans, peacekeepers, eligible members of the Defence Force community and their families, along with F-111 fuel tank maintenance workers, their partners and immediate family members. For more information on eligibility or services please call 1800 011 046 or visit **www.dva.gov.au/vvcs**.

VVCS Educative and Therapeutic Group Treatment Programs

VVCS group programs aim to improve the quality of life of veterans and their families and complement counselling and other services that promote recovery through prevention, early intervention and treatment. All VVCS group programs are free to eligible participants and include:

BEATING THE BLUES – provide participants with an understanding of the nature of depression and anxiety and develop skills and techniques to manage symptoms more effectively. The program focuses on developing an increased sense of wellbeing, purpose and resilience.

MASTERING ANXIETY – helps participants to better understand the nature of anxiety and factors that maintain it. The group explore various relaxation methods and work to develop and implement effective coping strategies.

DOING ANGER DIFFERENTLY – helps participants to recognise and manage angry feelings and develop strategies to reduce aggressive behaviour.

SLEEPING BETTER – participants learn about sleep patterns and the impact of sleep disturbance on general wellbeing. They are taught self monitoring and management techniques to enable them to address sleep disturbance more effectively.

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS – participants develop skills to strengthen emotional ties, develop greater mutual appreciation, communicate more effectively and share goals for the future.

For more information or to find out if a program is running in your region please contact your local VVCS centre on 1800 011 046 or visit **www.dva.gov.au/vvcs**

MHPE VOLUNTEERS – WHAT DO THEY DO?

MHPE volunteers share health information. For example, giving a talk on a health issue at a local community group or ex-service organisation meeting; setting up or working with 'Men's Sheds', running a stand at a community expo; or by having a one-on-one chat.

To talk to a volunteer, please contact the relevant MHPE State/Territory Volunteer Representative below:

NAME	STATE/TERRITORY	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Sean O'Mara	North Queensland	07 4952 4960 or 0427 524 960	sean.betty@bigpond.com
Kevin Moss	South Queensland	0418 734 899	
Ben Richardson	Metro Victoria	03 9578 1855	benricho2@bigpond.com
Gary Treeve	Regional Victoria	02 6059 2765 or 0407480 201	mtreevei@bigpond.com
Darryel Binns	Northern Territory	0417 170 171	twods47@gmail.com
Kathleen Behrendt	South Australia	08 8837 7287 or 0428 377 287	raycat@internode.on.net
Laurie Harrison	Tasmania	03 6263 7038 or 0428 626 370	trout.2@bigpond.com
Mark Hills	New South Wales & ACT	02 6633 7108 or 0457 140 768	hillsy373@bigpond.com
Stewart Harding	New South Wales & ACT	02 4443 8919 or 0422 208 902	stewharding@netspace.net.au
Malcolm Small	Western Australia	08 9337 6773 or 0408 935 687	tinys@westnet.com.au

KEEPING YOUR MIND ACTIVE ANSWERS

Number Block Answers

								48
1	5	10	0	4	5	6	10	41
6	4	5	1	4	2	3	2	27
6	7	9	5	1	1	3	8	40
10	10	7	3	10	7	2	8	57
2	6	5	8	1	6	2	2	32
3	0	6	0	9	3	10	2	33
10	8	6	6	0	6	9	2	47
2	5	1	2	9	2	10	8	39
40	45	49	25	38	32	45	42	38

Hink Pink Answers

1. Bag Tag
2. Couch Slouch
3. Crude Dude
4. Doom Room
5. Meek Geek
6. Goat Boat
7. Smart Tart
8. Fat Hat
9. Wage Rage
10. Live Hive

Commonym Answers

1. They are waxed
2. They have cups
3. Pronouns
4. Largest of their kind
5. Blood suckers
6. They are contagious
7. Fractions
8. Shades of yellow
9. They have pits
10. Beans

Word Change Answers

pouch	hole	must	last	wood
poach	home	dust	lost	word
peach	come	dusk	loot	ward
peace	comb	dunk	loon	wand
		dune	moon	sand

Mumbo Jumbo Answers

japan, korea, phillipines, vietnam, cambodia

Final Message: **ASIAN COUNTRIES**

YOUR BRAIN MATTERS

A GUIDE TO HEALTHY HEARTS & MINDS

Being brain healthy is important at any age, whether you're young or old. Scientific research suggests that living a brain healthy life, particularly during mid-life (generally from 40 to 65 years of age), may reduce a person's risk of developing dementia later in life. To live a brain healthy life, you need to look after your brain, your body, and your heart. They are all important.

KEEPING YOUR BRAIN ACTIVE MATTERS

Keep your brain challenged and be socially active.

Scientists have found that challenging the brain with new activities helps to build new brain cells and strengthen connections between them. This helps to give the brain more 'reserve' so that it can cope better and keep working properly if any of the brain cells are damaged or die.

Choose activities that are challenging and you enjoy doing. Challenge yourself often and keep learning new things throughout your life.

Participating in social activities and interacting with others exercises brain cells and strengthens the connections between them. Social activities that involve mental activity and physical activity provide even greater benefit for brain health and reducing the risk of developing dementia. So try to do some of these as well.

Catch up with family and friends to keep your brain active – even better, catch up over a walk

Organise cards or games nights with friends or join a local community club

Learn to play a musical instrument or go to the theatre or a concert

Learn new things or participate in activities you enjoy such as painting, craft or orienteering

Sign up for a short course in something new like yoga, woodwork or photography – you will learn new skills and meet new people

BrainyApp™ If you would like a fun and interactive way of looking after your brain health, go to your app store and download BrainyApp on your smartphone or tablet. Visit **brainyapp.com.au** for more information.

UNDERSTAND ALZHEIMER'S
EDUCATE AUSTRALIA
FIGHTDEMENTIA.ORG.AU

YOURBRAINMATTERS.ORG.AU

BEING FIT AND HEALTHY MATTERS

Eat healthy and participate in regular physical activity. Your brain needs a range of nutrients, fluids and energy to work properly.

Avoid a high intake of foods that are high in saturated fats (butter, deep fried food, processed deli meats, cakes, pastries and biscuits). Choose a variety of foods that include vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, nuts and reduced fat dairy products. Eat fish, lean meat and cook with monounsaturated or polyunsaturated oils (canola, olive, sunflower and soybean oils).

If you drink alcohol, you should only drink in moderation, which is no more than two standard drinks per day.

Regular physical activity is beneficial for brain health. It helps with blood flow and oxygen supply to the brain.

Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day. Choose activities that you enjoy doing such as walking, swimming, dancing, tai chi or join an exercise group.

- Learn to dance – it's great exercise for your body and brain
- Eat a variety of foods from different food groups and cut back on saturated fats
- Include omega 3 fatty acids from oily fish and other sources such as walnuts in your diet
- Enjoy two pieces of fruit a day – make a fuit salad, include at breakfast
- Include five serves of vegetables in your diet each day
- Build at least 30 minutes of physical activity into your normal daily routine

LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEART MATTERS

What is good for the heart is good for the brain.

Research indicates that having diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure, and not treating them effectively, can damage the blood vessels in the brain and affect brain function and thinking skills.

It is important to have regular health checks and follow the advice of your doctor or health professional. Manage your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and body weight at levels that are healthy for you, and follow their treatment advice.

Evidence shows that smoking increases the risk of dementia. To keep your brain healthy, smoking should be avoided.

- Speak to your health professional for advice on how to lose excess weight
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly
- What's good for the heart is also good for the brain – speak to your doctor about checking your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and weight regularly
- If your're 45+, you should get regular heart and stroke risk assessments
- Avoid smoking – speak to your health professional or call Quitline on 13 78 48 for help on how to quit

For more information on living a brain healthy lifestyle visit Alzheimer's Australia's **yourbrainmatters.org.au**

Interpreter

Or call the National Dementia Helpline **1800 100 500**
For language assistance call the Telephone Interpreter Service on **131 450**

Alzheimer's Australia's Your Brain Matters program is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Chronic Disease Prevention and Service Improvement Fund

Men's Health Peer Education (MHPE) program aims to raise the veteran community's awareness of men's health issues and encourages men to manage their own health and wellbeing. The program trains volunteers from all age groups to provide health information to members of the veteran community.

MHPE volunteers share this information via many channels, for example, giving a talk on a health issue at a local community group, holding a stand at a community expo or speaking person-to-person with a veteran, such as a friend at a barbeque. The MHPE program is open to any member, male or female, of the veteran, ex-service, or general community, who is able to volunteer their time and has a genuine interest in helping veterans to learn about healthy lifestyle choices.

For information about the MHPE program, visit our website www.dva.gov.au/mhpe.htm or contact the relevant DVA MHPE Coordinator below:

NAME	LOCATION	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Nikki Wood	Queensland	07 5630 0203	MHPEQLD@dva.gov.au
Jumae Atkinson	Western Australia	08 9366 8355	Jumae.Atkinson@dva.gov.au
Kerry Jay	Victoria	03 9284 6199	MHPEVIC@dva.gov.au
Janice Trezise	Northern Territory	08 8935 1405	MHPENT@dva.gov.au
Margie Gutteridge	South Australia	08 8290 0375	MHPESA@dva.gov.au
David Stevens	Tasmania	03 6221 6711	MHPETAS@dva.gov.au
Naomi Blundell	NSW & ACT	02 9213 7661	MHPENSW@dva.gov.au

Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs
Men's Health Peer Education

Produced by
Editor
National Coordinator, Men's Health Peer Education
The Department of Veterans' Affairs

Available for download at
www.dva.gov.au/mhpe.htm

Feedback, Articles and Ideas
Email the editor: **menshealth@dva.gov.au**

Mail your letter to:
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Men's Health Peer Education Magazine
Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998
Sydney NSW 2001

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Your local contact is:

Next issue due out in March 2014
THEME: 'The Most' issue: The top ranking issues for and about men. An open theme on the topics you need 'most' to read about.

Deadline for articles is the 17 January 2014

If you'd like to share your story with our readers or have an idea for an article, we'd like to hear from you. You can email the Editor at menshealth@dva.gov.au or call 1800 555 254 (regional) or 133 254 (metro) and ask for the MHPE National Coordinator.

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