

Why do we need to prevent dementia?

The increasing number of senior citizens in Malaysia over the past decades (approximately 2 percent every year) subsequently indicates the growing importance for dementia prevention.

Several viewpoints are needed to be taken and several initiatives can be made to stop the progression of dementia in its tracks.



Alzheimer's Disease Foundation Malaysia (ADFM)

Alzheimer's Disease Foundation Malaysia (ADFM) is a non-profit organization formed in 1997 with the objective of helping people with dementia and their caregivers in the country. ADFM supports a wide network of support groups throughout Malaysia to empower them to promote and offer care and support for people with dementia and their carers. ADFM's vision is an improved quality of life for people with dementia and their families in the country. Besides that, ADFM plays the role of promoting greater awareness of dementia, besides advocating for the dementia community in Malaysia.

For more information please visit:
www.adfm.org.my

IMU Cares

The philosophy of the IMU Cares programme is focused on making specific elements of the IMU Vision into reality. These include helping to create "a community of scholars and professionals committed to serving society, promoting the development of students to reach their true potential in becoming competent, ethical, caring and inquiring citizens and visionary leaders".

For more information please visit:
www.imu.edu.my/imucares

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Preventing Dementia



Serving the Community

Lifestyle

Physical activities:

- Exercise for 30 minutes at least 5 times per week. Example of such exercises are brisk walking at least 2.5 km in half hour and cycling 8km in half hour.

Physical exercises are useful in retaining and even enhancing cognitive functions in older adults.

- Regular exercising is beneficial in delaying the onset time of dementia for over 6 years.

Cognitive and Social activities: goal oriented activities

- Participating in mental stimulating activities can reduce the risk of dementia. Some of the examples of activities are playing puzzles, reading newspapers, cooking, painting and knitting delay the onset of the dementia.
- Strong social support is also essential in preventing dementia as social isolation is linked to cognitive decline at later age.

Diet

- Adopt a well-balanced diet, avoid smoking and reduce alcohol intake.
- Dietary salt intake should be less than 5 grams per day and dietary sugar intake less than 40g per day.
- Obesity and Diabetes are linked to Dementia.

Injuries

- Minimize participation in activities or occupations that could cause head injuries, as head traumas doubles the likelihood of dementia.

Increasing Knowledge

First and foremost, it is essential to understand what we are dealing with, before having any chance to prevent it.

Two factors are the biggest causes of gap of knowledge on dementia in Malaysia:

- Lack of awareness.
- The presence of stigma.

Majority of Malaysians perceive dementia to be 'a normal side effect of aging'. This would lead to a significant delay in detecting dementia. It is problematic because it is crucial to detect this illness earlier to start interventions.

On the other hand, the stigma would stop help-seeking behaviors of patients.

So, gaining knowledge about dementia is crucial and it can be done by attending talks or doing readings on this matter.



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Attending to Modifiable Risk Factors

The causes of dementia consist of specific mechanisms that leads to loss of neurons.

Some of these factors can be avoided, or 'modifiable'. These factors can be categorized under two domains; biological and lifestyle.

Biological

Several medical conditions have been known to comorbid with Dementia. For example, critical diabetes and hypertension can lead to acute stroke which itself is one of the well-known causes of vascular dementia. In a way, we can prevent dementia by preventing hypertension and diabetes.

To prevent hypertension and diabetes, we should;

- Eat a balanced diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Cut back on salt and sugar.
- Cut back on alcohol.
- Monitor blood pressure regularly.
- Maintain healthy weight.

