

# Look After Your Health, Even Before You Retire

It's a fact of life that no one can escape. You will grow old, but at least you can do that gracefully and not be a burden on anyone. Aging gracefully traces back to how we conduct ourselves during our younger years. The outcome is a result of what we put in earlier.

The most common sicknesses among the elderly are coronary heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels. These are medical conditions that tend to develop as one ages.



These illnesses emerge when one's physical health has not been well cared for and neglected. Following these typical illnesses, there is also a tendency to develop alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease which is one of the most severe diseases commonly found. It's prevalent among the elderly and causes considerable difficulty for both the elderly patient and their family. Risk of developing alzheimer's disease increases with age.

In the early stages of alzheimer's disease, the symptoms are mostly confined to occasionally being forgetful. As the conditions worsen, there will be activity and emotional disorders or psychological conditions which include turning aggressive, feeling misled, developing hallucinations, or feeling threatened.

The Ministry of Health statistics on alzheimer's disease reveal that it is found in people age 60 upwards. Globally, 33.9 million people suffer from alzheimer's disease and it is expected to triple within the next 40 years. In Thailand where there are 8.3 million people age 60 or over, it is estimated that 830,000 people have alzheimer's disease.

It is a concern to see that the Ministry of Health has forecasted that this disease will become a major problem in the future and a tendency for those under age 60 to develop this disease, especially among patients who are suffering from arterial diseases

such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and a high cholesterol condition. These are patients are particularly prone to develop alzheimer's disease sooner than the average person. Most health problems stem from an imbalanced lifestyle that has been prolonged over time until the body has adapted to it. Therefore, to prevent alzheimer's disease at old age, you should look after your health much earlier on while you are still young.

The Alzheimer Foundation of Thailand recommends these 8 tips to prevent development of alzheimer's disease

1. Maintain a balanced nutrition. Avoid medication or exposure to substances which are harmful to your brain such as alcohol or unnecessary consumption of medicines.
2. Perform brain exercises by stimulating thinking activities for your brain such as through regular reading, writing, performing math calculations mentally without a calculator, watch quiz games, learn to use new equipment or gadgets, etc.
3. Exercise regularly, 3-5 sessions a week, by doing activities such as walking, Chinese aerobics, aerobic dance, swimming, etc. Exercise will improve your blood circulation and increase blood flow to the brain and promote the body's conversion of oxygen into energy. This help reduce the risk of alzheimer's disease by 60%.
4. Engage in conversation and meeting people such as by spending time at temples, going to parties, or joining social gatherings of senior people.
5. Get annual medical checkups. If you have a personal medical condition, monitor your condition regularly to detect irregularities, address any high blood pressure conditions, diabetes, etc.
6. Be careful of accidents which may impact your brain.
7. Be constantly mindful of your actions and perform meditation regularly.
8. Do not worry constantly or become stressed. Engage in activities that help reduce stress since stress and depression are harmful.

The 8 tips above can be carried out even by the elderly. They help slow down the brain's degeneration process.

If you are already entering old age and wonder whether you are vulnerable to alzheimer's disease or not, you may find out by going through a test that's jointly developed by the Alzheimer Foundation of Thailand and the Thailand Center of Excellence for Life Sciences (TCELS), Ministry of Science and Technology.

The probe performed by the application is a preliminary screening process developed by Dr. Nantika Taweetchachart, Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University. It's development is based particularly on average standards among senior Thai citizens. The application consist of 11 questions:

1. Inquire about the same issue frequently
2. More forgetful. Problems with short-term memories.
3. Must be reminded to perform necessary tasks
4. Forgetting appointments, dates which are important to the family such as birthdays and anniversaries or special holidays
5. Depressed, sad or cry more often
6. Reduced ability to solve mathematical problems, handle cash, or manage personal finances
7. Less enthusiam in activities you previously enjoyed such as hobbies and social activities.
8. Increasingly require assistance from others to help you perform normal routine tasks such as eating
9. Irritable, moody, and suspicious of others. Paying more attention and believing in things which are not true.
10. Difficulty in dealing with directions such as getting lost while driving or inability to remember the route. Also included are more risky driving style or quitting driving altogether.
11. Difficult carrying conversations due to inability to remember words, names of people or items, or finishing one's sentences.

The series of questions above will calculate a score for you. The questionnaire application runs on iPads and Android mobile devices and can be downloaded free from the Alzheimer Foundation of Thailand website [www.alz.or.th](http://www.alz.or.th) and the Thailand Center of Excellence for Life Sciences (TCELS) [www.tcels.or.th](http://www.tcels.or.th)

Always remember that strong physical foundations help reduce the chance of developing alzheimer's disease when you grow old. Good brain performance will help manage one's life smoothly.

These days, there are group activities organized by retirees, including cycling, exercising, etc. They create social circles for seniors, improves the quality of life and

raises enthusiasm. It's no longer true that being retired means staying idle. Retirement can mark the start of a new life.

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