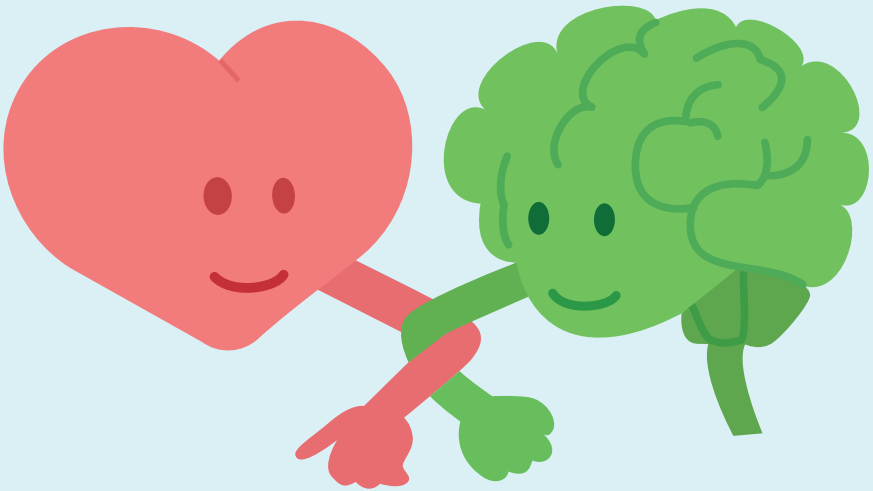
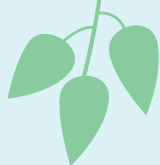


# Brain Health in Focus

with the FINGER Model





*Heart ♥ Brain*  
= TRUE

*Brain ♥ Heart*  
= TRUE

This publication can be downloaded  
as a PDF file at [www.demenscentrum.se](http://www.demenscentrum.se).

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## Brain health in focus

This booklet is for you who has an interest in brain health. We hope that it will inspire you to make small, simple changes to your everyday life – changes that can have a big impact on both your general health and your brain health.

Research shows that lifestyle is directly linked to brain health. We can prevent, reduce the risk of, or delay the onset of memory problems and cognitive diseases, such as dementia, through a combination of lifestyle measures. There are, of course, no guarantees – we can all develop a cognitive disease like dementia, but the fact that we can have an impact on our brain health at all is very positive. The importance of lifestyle for brain health has previously been underestimated. There is significant scope for potential health gains, regardless of whether you have good brain health or some form of cognitive disease.

Miia Kivipelto, Professor of Clinical Geriatric Epidemiology, has conducted research on the effects of lifestyle on the brain for many years. Her renowned FINGER study focused on five lifestyle areas (referred to as fingers) that jointly contribute to better brain health.

This booklet covers basic knowledge of the five fingers, and provides concrete tips for each finger – what to do and how to do it. The tips should not be seen as strict instructions, but rather as pointers for how to improve brain health.

We at the Swedish Dementia Centre, together with the FINGERS Brain Health Institute (FBHI), want everyone to know what we know. You and your brain don't want to miss out on this!

# The brain is amazing

Our brain is amazing! Thanks to the brain, we can plan, think and carry out things. With the help of our so-called cognitive faculties, we can remember facts, events and processes, solve complex tasks, orient ourselves, communicate and interpret our surroundings. All of this usually works well, as long as our brain is healthy. However, just like other organs in the body, the brain can suffer from damage and disease. In everyday terms, this is usually referred to as cognitive disease or dementia. What used to be straightforward, such as remem-

bering things, finding your way home or planning your purchases and going shopping, becomes increasingly difficult – and downright impossible over time.

Anyone might develop dementia, and there is still no cure. Scientists around the world are feverishly working to develop medicines that can cure dementia. We hope that they one day succeed. We can, on our own, make a difference today, through lifestyle changes that may delay the potential onset, and thereby gain more healthy years.

## Some short facts about dementia

- Dementia is a collective term for a range of symptoms that are due to damage or disease that destroy nerve cells in the brain. Dementia is thus an umbrella term.
- The most common cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for almost 70 % of all dementia. The second most common type is vascular dementia.
- There are currently more than 55 million people living with a dementia disease in the world.
- Everyone with a dementia diagnosis has a so-called cognitive disease. But not everyone with a cognitive disease has dementia.
- Dementia cannot be cured, but there is symptom-relieving medication that can alleviate some symptoms at an early stage of the disease for certain dementia diagnoses.








What a synergistic effect!



## Combine five fingers to get the effect

You can prevent and reduce the risk of memory problems and cognitive disease by using the FINGER model.

### The five fingers of the FINGER model are:

-  healthy food
-  physical activity
-  mental stimulation
-  social activities
-  control of cardiovascular values (health measures related to the heart and blood vessels).

All fingers are equally important. They can be called the “big five” of brain health, and it is important to look after all of them. Looking after one or two lifestyle factors will, of course, benefit both your general health and your brain health. However, research shows that addressing all five fingers at the same time gives a significant positive effect. And that is the strength of the FINGER model – a synergistic effect that boosts the brain.



# Healthy food

The brain does well with a varied and nutritious diet. So what you eat really matters! But as you probably know, what counts as healthy food has changed over time. At regular intervals, the health authorities in different countries review research findings and update their diet and health recommendations. Dietary advice around the world is usually quite similar, although there are local variations.

We should, according to guidelines from the World Health Organization (WHO), eat more fruit and vegetables, fish and shellfish, legumes, nuts and

seeds. We should also choose plant-based fats over animal alternatives – for example, rapeseed oil or margarine instead of butter.

The media can sometimes portray healthy eating as a question of focusing on a few specific superfoods, however it is really about finding good eating patterns.

**“It is never too early  
– nor too late –  
to change your lifestyle  
to attain better brain  
health!”**





## Three things you can do for your brain health

- Eat fish and shellfish, preferably three times a week.
- Include vegetables in every meal.
- Try to reduce your intake of salt, sugar, red meat, cured meats and alcohol.



# Physical activity

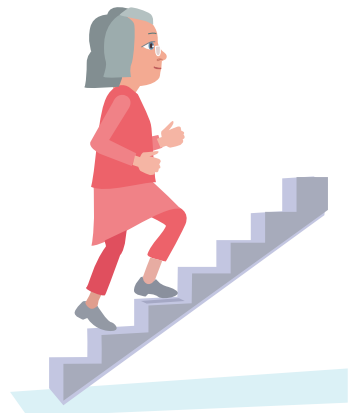
The wellbeing of the brain, like the rest of the body, benefits from physical exercise. Physical activity can be defined as any movement that increases the body's energy expenditure.

In addition to a basic level of everyday exercise, we should also engage in moderately strenuous activity for 150 to 300 minutes each week. Moderately strenuous activity includes, for example, brisk walking, jogging and aerobics. We should also supplement with balance and weight training at least twice a week. Balance and weight training are especially important as we get older.

**“All  
movement  
counts!”**

## Micro habits

You may have heard of micro habits. These are small, often simple, activities that you can easily include in your everyday life. For example, you can get off the bus one stop earlier to get an extra walk, do toe raises while you brew your morning cup of coffee or tea, or choose to take the stairs instead of the lift. We often have a more sedentary lifestyle these days, so it is important to incorporate breaks for physical activity. This is a good habit that benefits both the body and the brain.





### Three things you can do for your brain health

- Balance on one leg and try to draw a figure eight in the air with the other foot.
- Take regular exercise breaks, preferably every 20 minutes.
- Do 10 sit-to-stands every time you get up from the couch.



# Mental stimulation

The brain is one of our most sensitive and complex organs. It can be compared to a muscle, because it needs exercise to stay in shape. You may have heard the expression “use it or lose it”. Our brain needs exercise to maintain, as well as to develop, its functions.

Examples of brain exercises include various types of problem solving, such as sudoku and crosswords. Another example is

learning something new, like a language or musical instrument.

Variety is important when doing brain exercises, as the brain is stimulated by new challenges. It is also beneficial to gradually increase the level of difficulty, such as when you are doing crosswords or any other form of problem solving. The brain feels good when it has had an opportunity to exert itself. Plus, the brain wants to have fun.

**“Use it or lose it!”**



It would be great seeing you again!  
Can I have your number?

Sure! Do you mind if I say it backwards?



## Three things you can do for your brain health

- Try to follow a tricky user manual.
- Master a new skill – maybe learn to play a musical instrument or to cook a new dish.
- Memorise your grocery list when you go shopping.



# Social activities

Social activities refers to all activities where we spend time together with others. Research shows that social activities and interaction with other people are important for brain health. They have a protective effect. But it is equally important to alternate activities and socialising with time for recuperation. The brain needs to rest after stimulation, so sleep and relaxation are vital elements.

What feels relaxing depends on the individual. Some people like to lie on the couch to wind down, while others prefer to be outdoors in nature or maybe listen to music. Try to find your own favourite relaxation method and make sure you set aside time for it.

## About loneliness

Loneliness, especially perceived loneliness and a feeling of hopelessness, has a negative impact on brain health. People usually distinguish between being alone and feeling alone. Feeling alone

has a greater negative impact on health than actually being alone. Of course, some people enjoy solitude and thrive in their own company. But it is important to spend time with others sometimes, even for those who enjoy solitude. Research shows that spending time with others can help you to lower your stress levels and experience more positive emotions.

Studies also show that it's better to have a few close friends than a large, superficial social circle. But at the same time – all genuine social contact is beneficial for brain health and general wellbeing.

If you find it difficult to make connections with people, or find social situations too demanding, an alternative could be meeting people and socialising online. And you can always pick up the telephone to keep in touch.

**“Together makes  
for good company!”**

I haven't had time  
to read the book.  
But it's lovely  
to be here.



## Three things you can do for your brain health

- Join a choir or sign up for a course.
- Exchange a few words with the staff at the checkout.
- Reach out to a friend you haven't been in touch with for a long time.



# Control of cardiovascular values

As you probably know, keeping track of your heart health measures is important for your cardiovascular health. But it is just as important for your brain health – what affects the heart and blood vessels also affects the brain. Cardiovascular disease is linked to an increased risk of developing dementia. It is therefore important to keep track of your heart health measures.

The health measures you should check regularly are weight, blood pressure, blood sugar and blood fats (so-called cholesterol). To put it simply, avoid obesity, high blood pressure, high blood sugar and high levels of bad cholesterol.

There is a lot you can do to influence your heart health measures. For example, be physically active, eat healthy food, be social, and try to avoid stress. Even if you

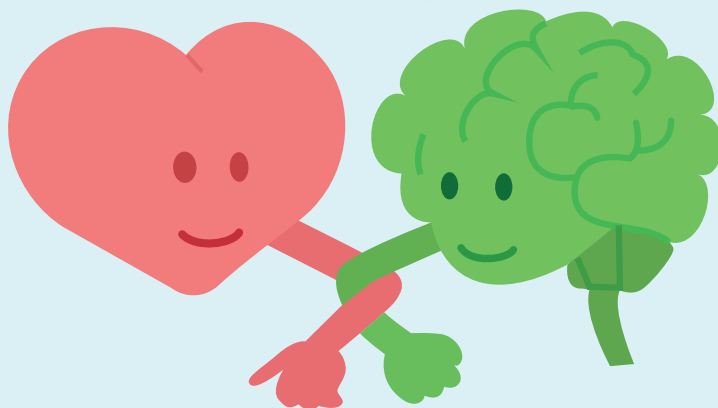
have a healthy lifestyle, it is important to get regular check-ups by your doctor. You may not be able to tell if you have poor heart health measures, and your results can sometimes be high despite a healthy lifestyle. As we get older, for example, we often develop higher blood pressure, and there may also be hereditary factors that affect these measures.

Sometimes it is not enough to make lifestyle changes. You may need medication to lower your blood pressure or cholesterol, for example. If you are prescribed medication, it is important that you take it. Never stop taking a medication without first consulting your doctor.



**“Think of your heart  
– for the sake of your  
brain!”**

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



### Three things you can do for your brain health

- Book a blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar check-up with your doctor.
- Follow your doctor's instructions if you are prescribed medication for high blood pressure or high cholesterol.
- Keep an eye on your weight. Both being overweight and underweight can be harmful to your health.

# My FINGER plan

You have now read various tips on how and what you can do to take care of your five fingers. You probably also have your own suggestions for activities that fit the FINGER model. Maybe you are ready to make your own FINGER plan? Think of it as a “deal” that you make with yourself, where you decide what to do, how often and for how long. After a while, you can add something new or increase the level of difficulty to challenge yourself further.

You can download and print a new FINGER plan at any time via [Demenscentrum.se/en](http://Demenscentrum.se/en). Free of charge, of course.

Good luck with your five fingers. And remember, start small! Better to take one small step that comes to fruition than to take no steps at all.



## Healthy food

To do: \_\_\_\_\_

How often: \_\_\_\_\_

Start date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Finish date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_



## Physical activity

To do: \_\_\_\_\_

How often: \_\_\_\_\_

Start date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Finish date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_



## Mental stimulation

To do: \_\_\_\_\_

How often: \_\_\_\_\_

Start date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Finish date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_



## Social activities

To do: \_\_\_\_\_

How often: \_\_\_\_\_

Start date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Finish date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_



## Control of cardiovascular values

Check blood pressure:  Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Check cholesterol:  Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Check blood sugar:  Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_



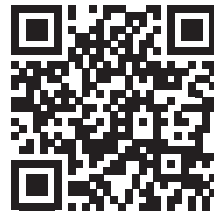
# More brain health


If you want more knowledge and information, you can do the FINGER abc online course. The course is free of charge and available at [Demenscentrum.se](https://demenscentrum.se) or directly via the QR code below.

The course consists of animated films and interviews with five experts, each covering a different lifestyle area. They provide tips and advice on how you can improve your brain health according to the FINGER model.

You can also get more in-depth information about the FINGER study itself via the FINGERS Brain Health Institute's website, [fbhi.se](https://fbhi.se). There you can also order short publications about the FINGER model and about food that is beneficial for brain health.

And finally, remember that it is never too early – nor too late – to change your lifestyle to attain better brain health!



An illustration on a light blue background. On the left, a woman with dark skin and hair in a bun, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, stands with her hands on her hips, looking towards the right. On the right, a man with light skin is lying in a tan hammock, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, with his hands behind his head. Two stylized green trees with rounded canopies are positioned behind them, each with a grey trunk. The ground is represented by light green patches. Two white speech bubbles with dark outlines are present: one above the woman and one above the man in the hammock.

Are you just lying here being lazy?

No, I'm lying here reducing the risk of memory problems and dementia.



The Swedish Dementia Centre (SDC) is a national centre of excellence that collects, structures and spreads information and knowledge about dementia.

This publication is part of the FINGER abc free online course, developed by SDC in close collaboration with the FINGERS Brain Health Institute (FBHI); it is based on Professor Miia Kivipelto's groundbreaking research (the FINGER study).

We hope this booklet will inspire you to take care of your brain health through simple lifestyle measures.

Wilhelmina Hoffman,  
President of the Swedish Dementia Centre

