DAY 19: Dementia, Stroke & Parkinson's

Good morning team,

Today we're focusing on brain health - particularly thinking about dementia, stroke and Parkinson's disease. We'll cover some of the support available in the borough and what we can do to reduce our individual risk. One important thing to do is to check your blood pressure regularly - pop into a local pharmacy to ask for a free blood pressure check.

The good news is that the Take Five To Age Well actions include moving more, eating for health and being more socially active, so you're already taking steps to reduce some of the dementia and stroke risk factors. Take Five is evidence based and led by experts which is why we have academic advisors supporting us every step of the way. Check out this interview with psychology Professor Alan Gow from Heriot-Watt University about how we can keep our brains active as we age.

Let's go!

Summary:

- **Blood pressure**: what we eat has an impact on blood pressure which directly affects brain health. Lower your risk by eating: **colourful fruit and veg, wholegrains, oily fish, nuts, seeds and reducing salt**. If you or a loved one have a dementia or Parkinson's diagnosis, be aware these conditions can affect appetite and swallowing. More details in the eat section below.
- **Urinary tract infections (UTIs)** are very common, whilst they can be effectively treated, every year many people end up in hospital because of severe infection. Know the symptoms and when to seek help.
- Movement boosts brain health by improving blood flow, lowering blood pressure and reduces the risk of various brain conditions. Local activities are listed in the move section below as well as **dementia and Parkinson's friendly movement groups.**
- Social connection protects cognitive health and reduces the risk of conditions like dementia and Parkinson's. Social connection is also important for people experiencing dementia, Parkinson's or after stroke. Links to local **dementia cafés, Parkinson's groups and after-stroke meet-ups** are in the connect and engage section below.
- **'Use it or lose it'** - stay mentally active to reduce your risk. Do: socialise, play games, learn things, try hobbies and get creative. Also, know the symptoms: there is plenty of information on symptoms and what to do if you are noticing changes on the Alzheimer's Society and Parkinson's UK websites. It's also

always worth familiarising yourself with the symptoms of a stroke as stroke requires immediate medical assistance.

For more information...

Eat

Food plays a powerful role in brain health partly due to links to blood pressure. High blood pressure is one of the biggest preventable causes of stroke and vascular dementia. The upside is that developing high blood pressure is not inevitable - there are ways in which we can reduce our risk. Plus, even if we do develop high blood pressure, there are changes we can make to help control it as well as medications. It's important to **check your blood pressure regularly -** pop into a local pharmacy to ask for a free blood pressure check.

Eating for good blood pressure:

- Eat **colourful fruit and vegetables**: rich in antioxidants
- Choose **wholegrains**: support steady energy for the brain
- Include oily fish, nuts and seeds for **omega-3 fats**
- Reducing **salt**: helps manage blood pressure

It's also important to consider some of the changes to our eating habits that might happen with brain changes. Dementia can cause people to lose weight. There can be changes that may cause a loss of appetite or feelings of anxiety about eating. Eating enough food regularly is important to stay strong. For more information about eating and dementia, Alzheimer's Society has information on their website.

Parkinson's can also impact eating habits due to possible changes in the ability to chew and swallow as well as potential changes to how quickly food travels to the stomach. Parkinson's UK has more information on this and many other issues relating to Parkinson's Disease.

Drink

As ever here we are banging the drum for good hydration. Today, we're sharing a short animated video on urinary tract infections (UTIs)- the causes, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment. It's just a minute long and contains plenty of useful information - UTIs are extremely common and whilst they can be effectively treated, every year thousands of people are hospitalised due to a severe infection. Knowing the signs and getting diagnosed is key to protecting you so check out the video today!

Move

Physical activity is great for the brain. It improves blood flow to the brain and helps keep our blood pressure down which helps to prevent dementia and stroke. What's more, it naturally boosts mood and reduces stress. All things our brains love. So, **move for your mind** is today's mantra.

There are plenty of activities to get you active in Hillingdon - our leisure centres have a range of classes, walking groups operate locally and Age UK Hillingdon run activities also. Don't fancy anything formal - have a go at one of these ideas from Age UK.

If you or someone you care for are impacted by dementia, physical activity might become more challenging, but there are still lots of ways to improve wellbeing through movement. Head to the Alzheimer's Society website for activity ideas for people living with dementia or check out the full list of Hillingdon's **dementia-friendly groups and activities** including golf and walking tennis and discos. There's also a local walking football group for people with Parkinson's disease.

Real life stories: Mohan, who developed Alzheimer's, has been part of the We Are Undefeatable campaign championing the things we can do in the face of long term conditions.

Finally, this free course for carers goes into more detail about how to use physical activity to support you and the person you're caring for.

Connect and Engage

Staying socially connected is great for our brain health at any point in life. Isolation increases the risk of dementia and Parkinson's disease whilst meaningful connection throughout life helps keep the mind active and spirits lifted. It's never too late to develop your social network.

We've already discussed many of the local groups within Hillingdon but it's also important to note that people living with brain conditions such as Parkinson's, dementia or those that have had a stroke, also benefit from and gain connection and belonging from socialising. There are some really **great groups available locally** for people that are experiencing one of these conditions:

- **Dementia-friendly groups**
- **Parkinson's support groups**
- **After-stroke groups**
- **Dementia cafés**,

Think

Promoting our brain health as we age depends on all sorts of factors. We focus on five key areas at Take Five HQ, all evidence based when it comes to ageing well.

The ageing brain: ‘use it or lose it’ is a great summary of how we can protect and promote our memory and thinking skills as we age, including links to other resources for those who like to get into the details.

If you are reading this and are concerned about your brain health or someone else’s there is plenty of information on symptoms and what to do if you are noticing changes on the Alzheimer’s Society and Parkinson’s UK websites. It’s also *always* worth familiarising yourself with the symptoms of a stroke as stroke requires immediate medical assistance.

For anyone reading that has got a dementia diagnosis, alongside support groups, **our local NHS runs a specialist memory service.**

Tip of the Day!

Sleep, sleeep sleeeep. Sleep is an essential part of life for humans and almost all animal life on our planet. Sleep is a time of brain activity - our brains run through memories and store them for the future and it’s thought the brain is cleaned of waste chemicals effectively whilst we sleep. If we sleep badly, we find it difficult to carry out tasks the following day and poor sleep might be a risk factor for dementia. Enough, good quality sleep is important for our brains in the short and longer term. So, with this in mind, consider your sleep patterns and whether there is anything you could do to improve the quality of your sleep? Diet, exercise, caffeine and your environment all make a difference.

For more information, here’s Age UK’s advice for good sleep.

- If you’re worried about dementia in yourself or someone close to you, this online checklist could help you describe symptoms to your GP and get the right support in place.

Wishing you a wonderful day, until next time,

The Take Five team.

Reminder: This information is general guidance and if you have any concerns over your own health please speak to your medical professional.