

# Bits & BYTES

## Web Winners

[www.ccsmh.ca](http://www.ccsmh.ca)

Do you have one or more residents in your long term care home with a mental health diagnosis? Acquired brain injury? Challenging dementia-related behaviours?

Long term care homes may find that they have become the only 'placement option' for younger seniors or others with these special needs or specific mental health issues, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder and depression.

If your team is struggling with issues related to delirium, depression, suicide risk assessment and prevention or treatment of mental health issues (with a focus on mood and behavioural symptoms), you will benefit from the website of the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH). Log on to [www.ccsmh.ca](http://www.ccsmh.ca) to

access and download the organization's carefully developed national guidelines for the issues listed above. The guidelines are extensively researched and offer a host of recommendations that address special needs in long term care.

To learn more about CCSMH projects, or to develop a partnership with the group, establish contact through the website.

[www.braininjury.org.au](http://www.braininjury.org.au) and [www.biac-aclc.ca](http://www.biac-aclc.ca)

Managing the behaviours of residents with acquired brain injuries can be very challenging. Check out the Australian website [www.braininjury.org.au](http://www.braininjury.org.au) for some very helpful fact sheets and other links. For a Canadian website, look up the Brain Injury Association of Canada at <http://biac-aclc.ca>.

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## Protect against Alzheimer's

### From the Harvard Mental Health Letter

Several drugs aimed at clearing amyloid deposits from the brain—which investigators had hoped would reverse the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease—have failed in late-stage testing. Reports on tests of other interventions to prevent or slow Alzheimer's have also been discouraging: statins, vitamin supplements, and ginkgo biloba have failed to provide any benefit. It now appears that remaining mentally and physically fit are the best options for preventing—or at least delaying—Alzheimer's from developing in the first place, reports the February issue of the Harvard Mental Health Letter.

For example, a study published in November 2008 provided evidence that cognitive reserve—an attribute encompassing thinking and memory abilities—may help delay Alzheimer's symptoms. It's not clear why, but people with more cognitive reserve may be able to compensate for any thinking deficits by using other parts of their brains. Researchers were surprised that when they compared people with the same extent of amyloid plaque, those with more education scored better on overall cognitive function than those with less education. Thus, education may create a cognitive reserve that raises the threshold for Alzheimer's disease.

Two studies published in 2008 add to the evidence that overall cardiovascular fitness may help delay cognitive decline—possibly by keeping blood vessels healthy or by increasing blood flow to the brain. The Rush Memory and Aging Project found that the more active people were on a daily basis, the better they performed on tests of cognitive function. Likewise, the Fitness for the Aging Brain Study found that people who exercised regularly scored better on tests of cognitive function and memory than those who did not.

Dr. Michael Miller, editor in chief of the Harvard Mental Health Letter, notes that achieving modest gains—particularly by remaining mentally and physically active—is the best option.

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## Outgoing and Relaxed People Less Likely to Develop Dementia

People who are active, outgoing and relaxed may be less likely to develop dementia, according to a new study from Karolinska Institute. The research found that people who were socially isolated or inactive but relaxed had a 50 per cent lower risk of developing dementia compared with people who were isolated and prone to distress. The dementia risk was also 50 per cent lower for people who were outgoing and relaxed, compared to those who were outgoing but prone to distress. "In the past, studies have shown

that chronic distress can affect parts of the brain, such as the hippocampus, possibly leading to dementia, but our findings suggest that having a relaxed and outgoing personality in combination with an active lifestyle may decrease the risk of developing dementia even further," said study leader Dr. Hui-Xin Wang at the Aging Research Centre (ARC) in Stockholm. "The good news is, lifestyle factors can be modified as opposed to genetic factors, which cannot be controlled." **LTC**