

Healthy habits make for a healthier mind

SOUTH Africans old enough to remember the advertising jingle "Braaivleis, rugby, sunny skies and Chevrolet" may want to nurture habits such as fish braais, drinking coffee and wine, walking under sunny skies and mental exercise — all of which reduce the risk of dementia.

Psycho-geriatrician Dr Felix Potocnik, who is based at the University of Stellenbosch, said: "Certain healthy habits — like exercise to protect against vascular disease, a Mediterranean diet, three to five cups of coffee and 250ml to 500ml of red wine per day, the intake of omega 3, vitamins B6, B12 and C [vitamin E is controversial] and statins [to lower cholesterol] — have been shown as beneficial to lower the risk or slow down the early phases of cognitive impairment."

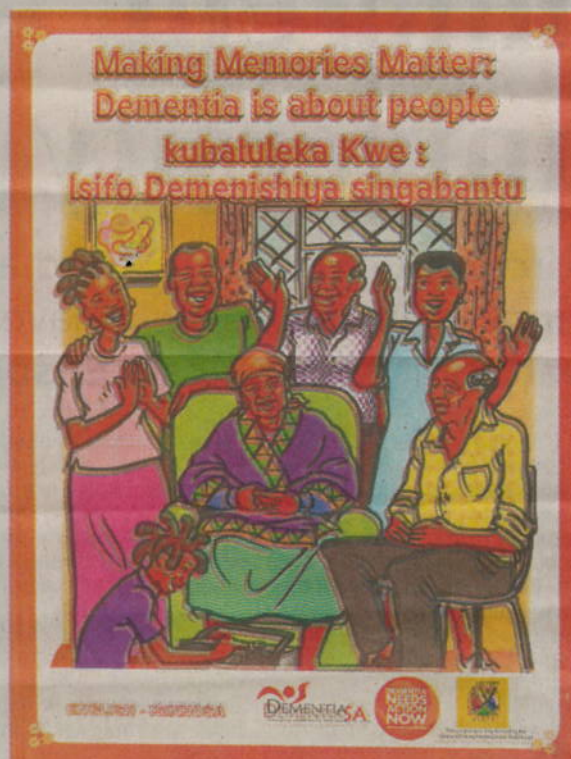
With regard to the treatment of people with dementia, encouraging a positive attitude and having responsibilities, such as caring for plants, has been proven to make a difference.

Music therapy can also have remarkable results.

Carol Lotter, the co-director of the master's degree programme in music therapy at the University of Pretoria, described two examples from recent case studies from her work with patients with dementia.

"Music draws people into social relationships, facilitates recall and stimulates being in the here and now," she said.

When Patient X, 69, who has Alzheimer's, started therapy, his stare was vacant or his eyes



HELP AVAILABLE: Dementia South Africa's 'talking book' plays a recording of advice about the disease

“Music stimulates being in the here and now

closed. But during the sessions he started to engage with Lotter.

On occasion, he reached out to touch her guitar strings, gestured, made eye contact or uttered words and even smiled as she responded to him through music.

Patient Y, 79, who has severe frontal temporal dementia, was usually asleep during the initial sessions but started to make eye contact, lift her hands and drop them on a drum and even sang

the words of familiar old songs.

"Music is a very powerful nonverbal medium and impacts at all level — emotional, physical, psychological and social," said Lotter.

● To raise awareness and educate people, Dementia South Africa is about to launch a "talking book", *Making Memories Matter: Dementia is about People*.

The book has 12 buttons that activate a recording of the book in either English or Xhosa. It explains the changes brought about by dementia and how to take care of those affected. — Claire Keeton