

Ways of doing Running with Dementia

Team Everyday Champions is a societal initiative established as part of WRRRC Copenhagen 26 to promote physical activity and social interaction among people living with dementia. Social exercise has proven benefits for both physical and brain health and may help slow the progression of the disease.

The experience from the running group shows that people with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and mild dementia can train, develop their abilities, and be active members of a running community. Some participants have even progressed to and continued training with regular running groups.

We want these experiences to live on and inspire, e.g. municipalities, sports clubs, and organizations to create similar initiatives for people living with dementia.

This guide brings together the key lessons learned from Team Everyday Champions.

1. Recruit through partnerships

Recruit participants through organisations and professionals who have direct contact with the target group, such as municipalities, healthcare services, hospitals, community organisations and carers. Communicate opportunities and a sense of community – not limitations.

2. Safe and familiar start is key

Make the start simple and predictable: provide clear information, a consistent welcome and clear expectations. Keep the physical setting and key contacts consistent. Small routines and reminders can make a big difference.

3. Train as usual – with structure

Use a familiar training structure – running, technique, strength and variation – with an emphasis on repetition. Start gently and avoid training programmes that depend on regular attendance. Adapt to how participants are feeling on the day. The most important thing is a positive experience – not performance.

4. Keep the coach's role clear

The coach is a running coach, not a healthcare professional. Their role is to create familiarity, motivation, community and a positive training environment – not to manage participants' health conditions or personal circumstances. However, make sure to clarify relevant risks and procedures around, for example, first aid, feeling unwell or low blood sugar with healthcare professionals or other relevant experts.

5. See the person before the challenge

Participants should first and foremost experience themselves as runners and as part of a team. The focus is on community, development, enjoyment and relationships.

6. Accept variation

Attendance and energy levels will vary. What matters is that everyone is always welcome, and that absences are not questioned or made into an issue that creates distance from the community.

7. Define success broadly

Success is not only about kilometres and times. It is also about confidence, relationships, enjoyment of life and the courage to take on more. The greatest success is the feeling: "I belong – and I can still be active."



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26

