



'Use it' or risk losing mind

By **CATHERINE
MADDEN**

AN hour of exercise a week may stave off depression and dementia in old age.

A WA study has found that elderly men who stay active are twice as likely to enjoy good mental health into their 80s as those who do nothing.

With new statistics revealing that more than 1000 Australians are diagnosed with dementia each week, the research is being hailed as the latest example of "use it or lose it".

For four years, a team led by Konrad Jamrozik, then University of WA professor of public health, followed the health and wellbeing of 601 men with an average age of 77.

He said: "What we

found has surprised us. Most of these men, about three-quarters of them, had aged very well when it came to their mental health, as judged from both their thinking and their mood.

"Whether or not they were married, and even the extent of their physical illness, didn't seem to be factors. Nor were aspects of lifestyle, such as diet or smoking habits in their 70s, particularly important.

"What did stand out was physical activity. Men who were physically active in their later years were almost twice as likely to be in good mental health at the age of 80."

Professor Jamrozik said the study, in collaboration with Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, supported growing evidence that exer-

cise had a far greater impact on overall wellbeing than previously thought.

He said the healthiest men enjoyed at least one vigorous workout a week, in any activity that made them puff or pant for about an hour.

"We think it looks very promising that this could be an important example of use it or lose it," he said.

"If you get to 80, you are one of the survivors. The ones in good mental shape are the ones who are prepared to stay active."

He said more elderly people should be encouraged to get out and about.

Prof Jamrozik presented his findings to the International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity in Brisbane this week.