



Exercise to save the mind

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

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

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

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, for four years.

Prof Jamrozik 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 though 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."

Prof Jamrozik said the study supported growing evidence that exercise had far greater effect on overall wellbeing than previously thought.

He said the healthiest men enjoyed at least one vigorous work-out a week — 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.

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