

Judo can be adapted as a safe, low-impact, and cognitively stimulating activity for people with dementia, offering benefits for balance, strength, coordination, and mental well-being.

Benefits of Judo for Cognitive and Physical Health

Judo is a martial art that emphasizes balance, coordination, and controlled movements, making it suitable for older adults, including those with cognitive impairments. Research shows that judo training can improve gait, balance, muscle strength, and executive function, while also enhancing memory and cognitive processing through structured, repetitive, and mentally engaging exercises. These benefits are linked to increased cerebral blood flow and neurotrophic factor expression, which support brain health and may help slow cognitive decline.

For seniors, judo is typically low-impact and technique-focused, reducing the risk of injury while still providing a full-body workout. The practice encourages mind-body coordination, which can help maintain functional independence and reduce fall risk, a critical concern for people with dementia.

Dementia-Friendly Adaptations

To make judo accessible for people with dementia, instructors can implement age-appropriate and dementia-friendly modifications:

Simplified techniques: Focus on basic movements and gentle throws rather than competitive

Short, structured sessions: Use clear, consistent routines to reduce confusion and anxiety.

Supportive environment: Ensure instructors and staff are trained to understand dementia-related challenges, such as memory loss or difficulty following instructions.

Social engagement: Group classes provide opportunities for interaction, which can improve mood and reduce social isolation.

Safety measures: Use mats, padded surfaces, and supervision to prevent falls or injuries.

Practical Considerations

Medical clearance: Individuals should consult healthcare providers before starting judo, especially if they have cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, or neurological conditions.

Instructor training: Coaches should be knowledgeable about dementia and skilled in adapting exercises to individual abilities.

Progressive approach: Start with gentle movements and gradually increase complexity as comfort and ability improve.

Integration with other activities: Judo can complement other dementia-friendly exercises, such as walking, tai chi, or seated strength training, to provide a holistic approach to physical and cognitive health.

Conclusion

Judo offers a multifaceted approach to maintaining physical fitness, cognitive function, and social engagement for people with dementia. With proper adaptations, it can be a safe, enjoyable, and effective activity that supports overall well-being, reduces fall risk, and

encourages mental stimulation. Programs should prioritize safety, simplicity, and supportive instruction to maximize benefits for this population.

[Guide to dementia-friendly sport and physical activity | Sport England](#)

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