

Dementia

Can we reduce the risk?

Research suggests that leading a brain healthy lifestyle may help to reduce a person's risk of developing dementia later in life. The general rule is what's good for the heart is good for the brain, so both should be well looked after with a balanced diet and regular physical and mental exercise.

The evidence shows that people may reduce their risk of developing dementia by adopting healthier lifestyles. Much of what's needed are simple activities you can do in your day to day life.

Remember, it's never too late to make any of these changes.

Let's take a look at five ways you can help to reduce your risk of developing dementia.



1 Look after your heart

Smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and obesity all damage blood vessels. This increases the risk for both heart attacks and strokes. Research has also shown that these conditions can increase the chances of developing dementia later in life. These problems can be prevented through healthy lifestyles choices and can be treated effectively if they do occur.



2 Be physically active

Physical activity and exercise can help to control your blood pressure and weight, as well as reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer. There is also some evidence to suggest that being physically active can help to reduce the risk of developing dementia. The good news is that getting active is proven to make us feel good and is a great activity to do with friends and family.



3 Follow a healthy diet

Food is fuel for both brain and body. We can help to keep it functioning properly by eating a healthy, balanced diet. Some evidence suggests that a Mediterranean-type diet, rich in cereals, fruits, fish, legumes and vegetables can help to reduce the risk of dementia. While we need to do more studies into the benefits of specific foods or supplements, we do know that eating lots of fatty and processed foods which are high in saturated fat, sugar and/or salt is associated with a higher risk of heart disease, and is best avoided.



4 Challenge your brain

By challenging the brain with new activities you can help build new brain cells and strengthen the connections between them. This may counter the harmful effects of Alzheimer's disease and other dementia pathologies. By challenging your brain you can learn some great new things, so how about learning a new language or taking up a new hobby or sport?



5 Enjoy social activities

Social engagement may also be beneficial to brain health because it stimulates our brain reserves, helping to reduce our risk of dementia and depression. Try and make time for friends and family, you can even combine your activities with physical and mental exercise through sport or other hobbies.

What is dementia?

Dementia is a term used to describe any condition that causes deterioration over time of a variety of different brain functions such as memory, thinking, recognition, language, planning and personality. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 50–60% of cases of dementia. Other types of dementia include vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies and fronto-temporal dementia.

Most kinds of dementia have similar symptoms including:

- Loss of memory
- Problems with thinking and planning
- Difficulties with language
- Failure to recognise people or objects
- A change of personality

There are more than 44 million people with dementia worldwide. By 2030 this number is expected to have risen to almost 76 million and to around 135 million by 2050.

Alzheimer's Disease International

Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) is the international federation of Alzheimer associations around the world, in official relations with the World Health Organization. Each member is the national Alzheimer association in their country who support people with dementia and their families. ADI's vision is an improved quality of life for people with dementia and their families throughout the world.

World Alzheimer's Month

September is World Alzheimer's Month, an international campaign to raise awareness and challenge stigma.

Since 1994, World Alzheimer's Day™, held on 21 September each year, has been the only day on the calendar to unite people with dementia, carers and Alzheimer associations around the world. World Alzheimer's Month was introduced in 2012 and offers Alzheimer associations the opportunity to reach more individuals and groups and increase their efforts to call for improved support services for people with dementia and their carers.

Finding help

Support and information is available worldwide from Alzheimer associations in more than 80 countries. These associations exist to provide advice for both carers and people with dementia. To find your national Alzheimer association visit www.alz.co.uk/associations

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