

Reducing Risk of Dementia in Older Age

There is no cure for dementia (including Alzheimer disease), but there may be ways to lower the chance of developing it.

Dementia is a disease that is more common in older people. Alzheimer disease is the most common form of dementia and affects more than 5 million people in the United States. Alzheimer disease starts with memory loss, language problems, and difficulty with logical thinking. For now, there is no curative treatment for patients with Alzheimer disease. However, studies suggest that individuals may be able to lower their chances of developing it. Recent reports show that the number of people with new dementia diagnoses is decreasing in the United States. There are currently 3 main areas of focus in prevention of dementia: lifestyle habits, medical conditions, and mental and social well-being.

Lifestyle Habits

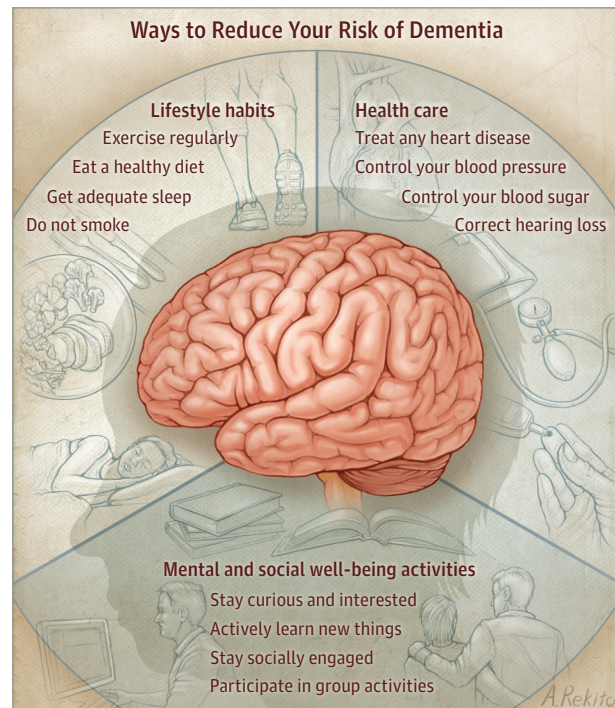
- **Increase physical activity.** Physical activity is a key factor for brain health. Regular exercise as simple as brisk walking for as little as 15 minutes a day protects brain structure and function.
- **Eat healthily.** A Mediterranean diet consisting of fish, olive oil, nonstarchy vegetables, and nuts has been related to lower risk of dementia.
- **Get a good night's sleep.** Adequate and uninterrupted sleep helps the brain repair itself. Good sleep hygiene improves the function of brain cells.
- **Do not smoke.** Smoking damages brain cells and vessels.

Medical Conditions

- **Treat heart problems.** Whatever is bad for the heart is bad for the brain. Heart attacks and heart failure have close links with dementia. Treating heart problems may protect the brain.
- **Control blood pressure and blood sugar levels.** High blood pressure and diabetes, especially in middle age, can damage the brain. Control of blood pressure and blood glucose (sugar) levels in midlife can improve brain health and may lower the risk of dementia in older age.
- **Protect the head.** Head injury increases the chance of developing memory and thinking problems. Wearing helmets and/or avoiding behaviors that increase the risk of head injury can decrease the risk of dementia.
- **Test hearing.** Hearing loss is linked to dementia.

Mental and Social Well-being

- **Stay involved, curious, interested, and willing to learn new things.** Being an active learner keeps the brain engaged and has beneficial effects on memory and information processing.



- **Stay socially engaged.** Engagement in social activities including sports, cultural programs, and support groups has a positive effect on brain structure and function and is associated with a lower risk of dementia.

Dementia has several causes and develops over decades of life. Therefore, prevention should start as early as possible and be maintained across the life span.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org/research/science/alzheimers_prevention_and_risk.asp
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/features/memory-healthy-aging/
- National Institute on Aging
www.nia.nih.gov/health/cognitive-health

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