

Reducing Risks for Dementia

As you age, you may have concerns about the increased risk of dementia. You may wonder are there steps that you can take to reduce the risks or prevent it. There are currently no approaches that have been proven to effectively treat or prevent Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. However, as with many other diseases, there may be steps you can take to help reduce your risk.

There are risk factors that may increase the chance of developing dementia. Some risk factors can be controlled while others cannot. For example, a person is not able to control their age, which is the greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's and related dementias. Another uncontrollable risk factor is a person's genes. Genes are structures in our body's cells that are passed down from a person's birth parents. Changes in genes — even small changes — can cause diseases.

Race and gender are also factors that influence risk. Research shows that African Americans, American Indians, and Alaska Natives have the highest rates of dementia, and that risk factors may differ for women and men. Researchers are investigating what is behind these differences.

Although there is no effective treatment or proven prevention for Alzheimer's and related dementias, in general, leading a healthy lifestyle may help address risk factors that have been associated with these diseases.

- **Control high blood pressure.** High blood pressure, or hypertension, has harmful effects on the heart, blood vessels, and brain, and increases the risk of stroke and [vascular dementia](#). Treating high blood pressure with medication and healthy lifestyle changes, may help reduce the risk of dementia.
- **Manage blood sugar.** Higher than normal levels of blood sugar, or glucose, can lead to diabetes and may increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, cognitive impairment, and dementia. Making healthy food choices, exercising, and checking glucose levels can help manage blood sugar.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese increases the risk for related health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. Maintaining a healthy weight can help.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Aim for a mix of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and seafood, unsaturated fats such as olive oil, low-fat or nonfat dairy products, and limited other fats and sugars.
- **Keep physically active.** Physical activity has many health benefits and may help with dementia. Aim to get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week.
- **Stay mentally active.** Lots of activities can help keep your mind active, including reading, playing board games, crafting or taking up a new hobby, learning a new skill, working or volunteering, and socializing.
- **Stay connected with family and friends.** Connecting with people and engaging in social activities can prevent social isolation and loneliness, which are linked to higher risks for cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease.
- **Treat hearing problems.** Hearing loss may affect cognition and dementia risk in older adults and can make it more difficult to interact with others. Protect your ears to prevent hearing loss and use hearing aids if needed.
- **Take care of your mental and physical health.** This includes getting your recommended health screenings, managing chronic health issues such as depression or high cholesterol, and regularly checking in with your health care provider.
- **Sleep well.** Sleeping well is important for both your mind and body. Try to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Talk with your doctor if you are not getting enough sleep, sleeping poorly, or think you may have a sleep disorder.

- **Prevent head injury.** Take steps to prevent falls and head injury, such as fall-proofing your home and wearing shoes with nonskid soles that fully support your feet. Consider participating in fall prevention programs online or in your area. Also, wear seatbelts and helmets to help protect you from concussions and other brain injuries.
- **Drink less alcohol.** Drinking too much alcohol can lead to falls and worsen health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, memory loss, and mood disorders. It is recommended that men should not have more than two drinks a day and women only one.
- **Stop tobacco use.** At any age, stopping smoking can improve your health and lower the risk of heart attack, stroke, and lung disease.

Researchers cannot say for certain whether making the above lifestyle changes will protect against dementia, but these changes are good for your health and are all part of making healthy choices as you age.

Source: National Institute of Health