



Alzheimer Scotland
Action on Dementia

Risk Reduction & Dementia: the Evidence

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Why look at risk reduction?

- Major public health issue
- Fourth biggest killer
- Demographic change
- Implications for individuals & families
- Economic cost to society
- Growing evidence of impact of lifestyle factors in middle age on dementia in later life
- People *want* to know



Who should be concerned about risk reduction?

- People in middle age – what you do now will influence your physical & mental health 20-30 years down the line
- Older people (65+) can still make simple lifestyle changes that will help reduce their risk.



Dementia risk factors

- Some risk factors unmodifiable:
 - Ageing – not inevitable but risk increases with age
 - Genetics – more likely to affect those under 65
 - Gender

Modifiable risk factors

- Cardiovascular problems –anything affecting blood supply to the brain – particularly influenced by **diet** and **physical activity**
- Mental stimulation
- Social stimulation

What does 'risk' mean?

- Evidence comes from studies of large populations – may not apply to me as an individual
- What was my dementia risk to start with – if my risk is currently 2%, and increases by 50% if I smoke, my risk then becomes 3%, not 52%

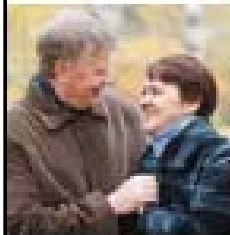


What can I do?

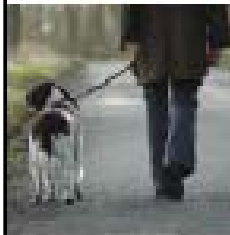
- Eat healthily
- Take moderate exercise
- Keep up social networks
- Exercise brain



Good for You - Good for Your Brain



Dementia - how to reduce **your** risk



Don't wait - **act now**



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What's the evidence? – Healthy eating

- A 'brain-healthy' diet:
 - Reduces risk of heart disease and diabetes
 - Encourages good blood flow to the brain
 - Is low in fat and cholesterol



The research findings (1)

- The headline?
- **Fish 'fights Alzheimer's'**
- US study found a 60% reduction in risk of AD in those eating oily fish at least once a week

The research findings (2)

- Other studies have found risk levels affected by consumption of:
 - saturated fats
 - the 'Mediterranean diet'
 - Vitamins C and E
 - folic acid
 - obesity (obviously affected by diet)



How to eat more healthily

- Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- Eat more starchy foods like bread, breakfast cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes (wholegrain varieties best)
- Eat more fish – at least 2 portions a week – 1 should be oily fish
- Cut down salt, sugar & saturated fats
- Increase intake of folate (folic acid)



What's the evidence? - Physical activity

- Why does it help reduce risk?
 - Gets the heart pumping
 - Gets blood circulation going
 - Helps carry nutrients & oxygen to the brain
 - Reduces risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes, all risk factors for dementia



The research findings (1)

- The headline?
- **Exercise 'cuts Alzheimer's risk'**
- 2006 US study - people who walked for 15 minutes 3 times a week had a 30% to 40% lower risk of developing dementia



The research findings (2)

- Other studies have found benefits from walking, housework, gardening, golfing, dancing and swimming
- A Swedish study found middle aged people who exercised for 20-30 minutes twice a week were between 50% and 60% less likely to develop dementia than those less active

How to increase physical activity

- 'Physical activity' doesn't have to involve sport
- Walking, taking the stairs, dancing, gardening, etc all count
- Recommended level of physical activity for adults is to build up at least 30 minutes of moderate activity, most days



What's the evidence? – Social networks

- Why are social networks important to dementia risk? Possibly:
 - Communicating and interacting exercises parts of the brain
 - Gives a sense of place in a family or community – self esteem, well-being
 - Provides emotional support
 - Provides a stimulating environment



The research findings (1)

- The headline?
- **'Dementia may travel lonely road in elderly'**
- One Swedish study found that a poor or limited social network increased the risk of dementia by 60%



The research findings (2)

- Other studies suggest the quality of networks more important than quantity
- Activities that **combine** mental, physical and social activities may be even better



How to keep up social networks

- Keep in touch with friends and family
- Go out with friends, family or colleagues
- Get involved in community – maybe as a volunteer
- Join a club
- Join a walking group, dance class or a reading group



What's the evidence? – Brain exercise

- Why does exercising your brain make a difference? It's not certain but:
 - Maybe stimulates more brain cell connections so that the brain can keep working longer even if cells are damaged

The research findings (1)

- The headline?
- **'Leisure activities protect against dementia'**
- US study found a 47% reduction in risk for AD in those who often did puzzles, read newspapers and listened to the radio



The research findings (2)

- Similar findings came from other studies ...
- One study asked people to recall what activities they did in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s - People who had done more 'intellectual activities' in their 20s and 30s were at a lower risk for Alzheimer's disease

How to exercise your brain

- Try new things to keep your brain active
- Keep doing things you already enjoy that stimulate your brain
- Read magazines, newspapers and books
- Play cards or board games
- Do crosswords and other puzzles
- Go to day or evening classes
- Learn a musical instrument or a language
- Play bingo



Other things you can do

- Go for regular health checks - blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, etc
- Stop smoking
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Drink alcohol only in moderation



Big numbers make big headlines

- Some big numbers being bandied about – 60%, 47% etc
- Remember that even by their 90's 2 out of 3 people won't have developed dementia
- But it's still important to do what you can to try and be dementia-free



There are no guarantees

- We can't say that, if you do everything right, you won't get dementia
- Nor that you must be to blame if you do develop dementia
- But adopting a 'brain-healthy' lifestyle *now* may reduce your risk



Want to know more?

- Order our free risk reduction leaflet - call 0845 456 7739 (24-hour Answerphone)
- visit www.goodforyourbrain.org
- Read our evidence booklet – order via above website
- For information about dementia, caring or risk reduction, phone the 24-hour Dementia Helpline on 0808 808 3000





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