

What is dementia?

Dementia is the progressive loss of the powers of the brain. The most common kinds are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. These diseases damage and kill brain cells, so that the brain cannot work as well as it should. This causes problems with memory, communication and thinking and also sometimes with activities such as handling money and dressing.

Why is dementia important?

For individuals, dementia can be devastating. Bit by bit it takes away people's ability to do everyday things. They lose the ability to make decisions about their lives. They become reliant on others. Families have to provide more and more support and care. There is no cure for dementia, and treatment is limited.

Dementia is also a major public health issue in Scotland. It is the fourth biggest killer after heart disease, strokes and cancer. It is most common among older people, and as life expectancy increases, there will be more older people and so more people with dementia. By 2031 there will be about 102,000 people with dementia in Scotland, up from 58,000 today.

Reducing the risk of dementia

Research shows that many factors affect the risk of developing dementia. Some you can't do anything about. For example, the biggest risk is getting older - dementia is more common in older people. But there's a lot you can do which may reduce your risk.

Dementia is something we tend not to think about in our 40s and 50s unless we know someone close to us who has the disease. However, the seeds of dementia may be sown 30-40 years before symptoms show

It's never too early or too late to take steps now which may reduce the risk of dementia later in life.



To order more copies of this leaflet, or if you want to know more about dementia, caring or risk reduction, please phone the **24-hour Dementia Helpline** on **0808 808 3000**.



Health warning

Lowering your risk does not mean you can definitely avoid dementia - but it may reduce your risk considerably.

The research this leaflet is based on looked at large groups of people, not individuals. None of us can be sure that making the suggested changes will reduce our risk of dementia.

Everyone is unique, with different genetics, lifestyle and environment, making it hard for researchers to look at any factor in isolation. There may be other influences we don't yet know about. Also, because dementia may start to develop years before symptoms show, some of the effects observed in studies could be the result of developing dementia rather than the cause.

It's like smoking and lung cancer; not everyone who smokes gets lung cancer while some people who don't smoke do get it. But we know that smokers have a higher risk. In the same way, you can't guarantee you won't get dementia - but you can reduce your risk.

We are pleased to have the support of these organisations in developing our risk reduction campaign.



Alzheimer Scotland - Action on Dementia is a company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland 149069. Registered Office: 22 Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh EH3 7RN. It is recognised as a charity by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, no. SC022315.

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What can you do?

There are practical, achievable things you can do now which could reduce your chances of developing dementia or, at the very least, improve your general health and wellbeing.

Research shows that:

- **healthy eating**
- **staying mentally active**
- **keeping physically active**
- **maintaining social networks**

are **good for you, good for your brain**, and may reduce your risk of dementia later in life.

Four more tips to reduce your risk of dementia:



Go for regular health checks

What's good for the heart is good for the brain. Get your blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked at least once every five years and more often if necessary. Early prevention could prevent problems later in life.



Stop smoking

Smoking affects your circulation and may increase dementia risk.



Maintain a healthy body weight

People who are obese are considerably more likely to develop dementia later in life than people with a normal body weight. One study found that obese people had a 74% greater risk while overweight people had a 35% greater risk.



Drink alcohol only in moderation

People who drink moderately may have a lower risk of dementia, but drinking too much can cause alcohol-related dementia, as well as many other problems. If you drink, don't exceed the weekly maximum of 14 units of alcohol for women and

21 units for men. A unit is, for example, a small glass of wine, a single measure of spirits or half a pint of ordinary strength beer or lager.

See inside for more information and tips.

Eat healthily



The evidence

A brain-healthy diet is one that reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes, encourages good blood flow to the brain, and is low in fat and cholesterol.

One American study found a 60% reduction in risk of Alzheimer's disease in people who ate oily fish at least once a week. Fish oils may help to prevent furring or hardening of the arteries and high blood pressure which can raise dementia risk.

A high intake of folate (folic acid) has also been shown in one study to reduce risk of Alzheimer's disease, by up to 55%. Fortified cereals, green leafy vegetables, orange juice, yeast extract and liver are all good sources of folate.

Another American study found that people who drank fruit or vegetable juice more than three times a week had a 76% lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease than those who drank juice less than once a week.

More research is needed to show exactly how diet relates to dementia risk. But meanwhile, you can't lose by eating healthily.

What should you aim at?

- Eat more fruit and vegetables - at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day (a portion can be a whole piece of fruit like an apple or orange or 2 large tablespoons of vegetables). A glass of fruit or vegetable juice counts as a portion.
- Eat more fish - at least 2 portions a week. One portion should be oily fish like salmon, mackerel and sardines - fresh, tinned or frozen
- Cut down on salt - no more than 6g a day
- Reduce the amount of fat, saturated fat and sugar in your diet
- Eat more starchy foods like bread, breakfast cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes - wholegrain, wholemeal or brown varieties where possible.

Stay mentally active



The evidence

Activities that need mental energy, such as reading, playing board games, doing crosswords or Sudoku puzzles and playing games such as bingo or bridge, may help stave off Alzheimer's disease.

One study found that older people who did crossword puzzles 4 days a week had a 47% lower risk than those who only did a crossword once a week.

We don't know for sure but it is possible that such activities stimulate more brain cell connections. That might mean that if brain cells are damaged, the brain can keep working well for much longer, and the person may not show symptoms of dementia.

What should you aim at?

Try new things to keep your brain active. Carry on doing things you already enjoy that stimulate your brain.

How to achieve it

- Read magazines, newspapers and books
- Play cards or board games
- Play bingo
- Do crosswords and other puzzles
- Go to day or evening classes
- Learn a musical instrument or a language



Take regular physical activity



The evidence

Regular physical activity helps the blood flow to the brain. It also helps reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes, which are all risk factors for dementia.

A recent study showed that people who exercised three or more times a week had a 30% to 40% lower risk of developing dementia compared with those who exercised fewer than three times per week.

It doesn't have to be strenuous exercise. One study found that older men who walked more than two miles a day had nearly half the risk of dementia compared with those who walked less than quarter of a mile a day.

What should you aim at?

The recommended level of physical activity is to build up at least 30 minutes of moderate activity, most days. Moderate activity is something like brisk walking or strenuous gardening - enough to make you warmer and make your heart beat faster.

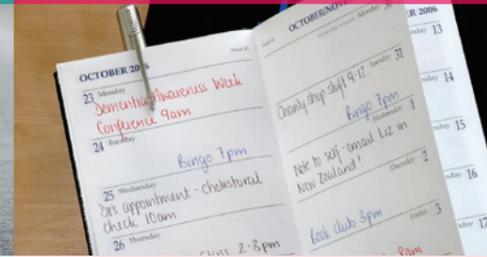
Try to build up gradually if you're not used to being active.

How to achieve it

Small changes to your daily routine can make big differences. Do things that you enjoy.

- Go for walks - no special equipment needed. Join a walking group if you'd rather walk with others
- Walk or cycle instead of taking the car, especially for short journeys
- Gardening, washing the car or cleaning windows all count as activity
- Get off the bus a stop or two earlier
- Take the stairs instead of the lift whenever you can
- Try something new like dancing or swimming or join a gym

Keep up your social networks



The evidence

A recent Swedish study found that having an extensive social network seems to protect against dementia. People with a poor or limited social network had a 60% increase in the risk of dementia.

Activities which combine mental, physical and social stimulation may be even better for reducing the risk of dementia such as day or evening classes, walking with a group or taking part in community groups.

What should you aim at?

Keep involved in the world around you. Try to make sure you do something sociable and enjoyable every day.

How to achieve it

- Keep in regular touch with friends and family
- Go out with friends, family or colleagues
- Get involved in your community
- Volunteer for something that interests you
- Join a club
- Join a walking group or a dance class - it will also increase your physical activity

