



Reducing Your Risk of Dementia

Reducing your risk of dementia

A **risk factor** is something that increases the likelihood of a person developing a condition. Research has identified a number of risk factors associated with the development of dementia. Some of these, like age or genetics, can't be changed but there are others, such as smoking, which we might be able to change which could help lower your risk of getting dementia.

Many of the risk factors for dementia are also risk factors for other medical conditions such as heart disease and stroke, so making small changes in your lifestyle can help protect you from a variety of health issues and improve your health generally.

This leaflet outlines some of the risk factors for dementia that can be changed, and suggests ways to maintain good health.

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Types of dementia

Dementia is a **set of symptoms** caused by damage to the brain from certain diseases or conditions. Currently, there is no cure for dementia and once a person has it, it gets progressively worse. There are many different types of dementia although some are far more common than others.

The most common types of dementia are:

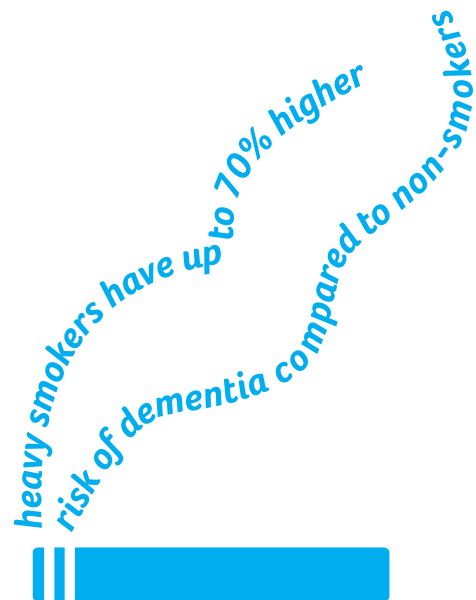
- **Alzheimer's disease** is a disease that causes dementia. It is the most common cause of dementia accounting for around two thirds of dementia cases.
- **Vascular dementia** is the second most common cause of dementia. It is caused when the blood supply to the brain is impaired.
- **Dementia with Lewy Bodies** accounts for around 10% of cases of dementia. Lewy bodies are tiny deposits of protein that can build up in the cells of the brain and are associated with damage and loss of function.
- **Frontotemporal dementia** is a less common type of dementia. Frontotemporal dementia is caused when nerve cells in the frontal and/or temporal lobes of the brain die and the pathways that connect them change.
- **Mixed dementia** occurs when people develop more than one form of dementia, such as both Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Smoking

Smoking is linked to numerous medical conditions including cancer, heart disease and stroke. You might be surprised to hear that evidence also suggests heavy smokers may have up to a 70% higher risk of developing all forms of dementia when compared to non-smokers. This risk can be significantly reduced by stopping smoking. Given the variety of diseases smoking is linked to, stopping or reducing the habit greatly improves your chances of living a healthy, disease-free life.

If you are thinking about cutting down or stopping smoking, ask your GP for advice or talk to Smokeline. **Smokeline** is Scotland's national stop smoking helpline, open every day from 8am to 10pm. Smokeline advisers give free information and advice about how to stop smoking and can work with you to come up with a plan that's right for you and your lifestyle.

Call free on **0800 84 84 84**.



Exercise

Like smoking, a lack of exercise has also been linked to a number of health problems. Being physically active is a really important part of a healthy lifestyle and can help prevent weight gain which can lead to type 2 diabetes - another risk factor for dementia. Staying active also keeps your cardiovascular system healthy, reducing the risk of stroke and heart disease. As well as reducing these other risk factors, research shows that regular exercise in middle-aged or older adults can improve thinking and memory and could lower the risk of a person developing dementia.

Older adults with no health conditions that limit them, should try to be active daily and do at least **150 minutes of moderate activity, such as brisk walking or cycling, every week**. You should also try to do strength and balance activities such as carrying shopping, gardening or yoga, at least twice a week.

Getting active doesn't have to mean going to the gym. You should try to do activities you enjoy as you will be more likely to stick to them. Making small changes to your routine like getting off the bus a stop or two earlier and walking up stairs rather than taking the lift or escalator all contribute to keeping us active. Sitting down less is important too, no matter how much exercise you do - try reading or listening to the radio whilst standing, or walking around whilst you're on the phone. For more information about keeping active see www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness.

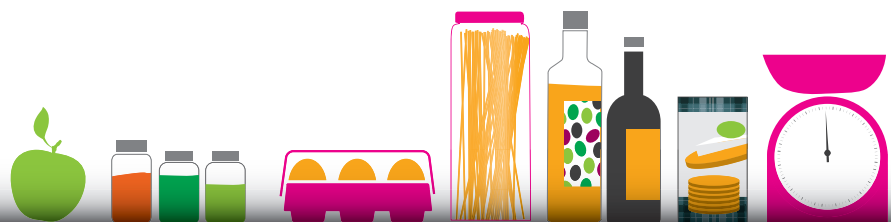


Diet

Eating healthily is one of the best ways to contribute to good health. Adopting a healthy diet can help to keep **cholesterol**, **blood pressure** and **weight** down and help prevent the development of **type 2 diabetes** which are all separate risk factors for dementia. There is also evidence that people who eat a Mediterranean diet may have a lower risk of developing memory and thinking problems.

A **Mediterranean diet** includes plenty of fruit and vegetables and starchy foods like bread and pasta, along with some fish and less meat. In general, it is better for you to eat fewer foods that are high in saturated fat, such as processed meats, butter and cakes and instead eat foods containing unsaturated fats such as oily fish, nuts, seeds and avocados. Ready meals and sauces are often high in added sugar and it is a good idea to swap these for homemade versions or ones which are lower in sugar and salt. Eating sugary snacks like chocolate and fizzy drinks can mean your diet is too high in sugar so try to only eat these as a treat. It is fine to eat the occasional slice of cake but try to eat healthily most of the time to get all the health benefits of eating a balanced diet.

As we get older our appetite can change and it can become harder to maintain a healthy diet. For hints and tips about eating healthily see Age Scotland's guide 'Eat Well' or talk to your GP for individual advice.



Weight

Research looking at the link between a person's weight and the chances of them developing dementia suggest that **both being overweight or obese, and being underweight, are risk factors**. Because of this the best advice is to try to stick to a healthy weight, within the healthy body mass index (BMI) range.

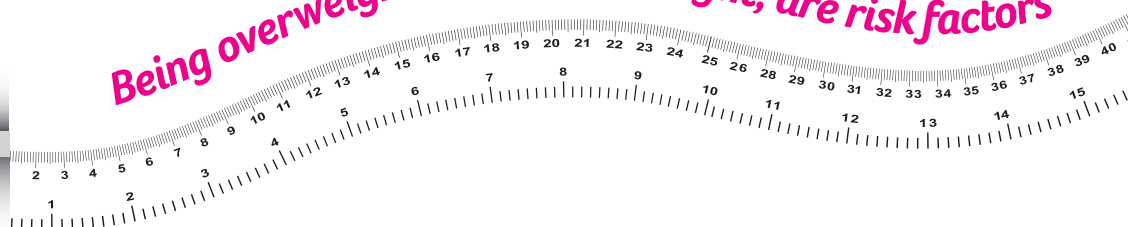
BMI takes in to account both your weight and your height. For most adults an ideal BMI is in the **18.5-24.9 range**. A BMI of:

- 18.5 or less is classed as underweight;
- 25-29.9 is overweight;
- 30-39.9 is obese;
- and 40 or more is very obese.

To work out your BMI you can **divide your weight in kilograms (kg)** by your **height in metres (m)**. Then **divide the answer by your height again**.

The NHS also offer 'BMI calculators' online which can work out your BMI for you. It offers options for calculating it in imperial measures as well as in metrics and offers hints and tips based on your results. You can find this calculator at: www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx.

Being overweight, and underweight, are risk factors



Alcohol

Studies investigating whether alcohol consumption is linked to dementia have had mixed results. However it is known that very heavy, long-term drinking can cause alcohol-related dementia which is called Wernicke-Korsakoff Syndrome. Excessive alcohol consumption has negative effects on both short- and long-term health, one of which might be brain damage that could lead to Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. **Studies have shown that people who drink heavily or engage in binge-drinking are more likely to develop dementia** than those who drink moderately.

You might have heard that a small amount of alcohol, particularly red wine, may protect the brain against dementia and keep your heart healthy. This might be true but it doesn't mean that if you don't currently drink alcohol you should start as a method of prevention against the development of dementia.

The exact link between dementia and alcohol is unclear, so the best advice is to follow the NHS guidelines which suggest that both men and women should limit their alcohol intake to 14 units a week and **no more than 2-3 units in a day**.

UNITS

A standard glass (175mL) of (12%) wine = 2.1 units

A pint of lower-strength (3.6%) alcohol beer or cider = 2 units

A pint of higher-strength (5.2%) alcohol beer or cider = 3 units

A single shot (25mL) of spirit e.g. whisky, gin or vodka (40%) = 1 unit

Just like we said about it being fine to treat yourself to the occasional slice of cake, in general it is fine to drink the occasional glass of wine or beer, but definitely try to stay within the NHS guidelines and **have at least 2 or 3 alcohol free days a week**.

Blood Pressure

Studies have shown that high blood pressure in mid-life can increase the risk of developing dementia, particularly vascular dementia. If you are 40 or over make sure to **get your blood pressure checked regularly by your GP** as high blood pressure rarely has any noticeable symptoms. A healthy blood pressure should be around 120/80mmHg. High blood pressure is diagnosed if you consistently record a blood pressure of 140/90mmHg.

Exercising, eating healthily, maintaining a healthy weight, not drinking too much and not smoking (see above) all help to maintain a healthy blood pressure so if you address these risk factors, your blood pressure is more likely to be healthy. If you do have high blood pressure, your doctor may advise you to make lifestyle changes (such as losing weight or exercising more), and can give you personalised recommendations and monitor your progress. High blood pressure can also be controlled by taking medication but lifestyle changes are usually advised in the first instance.

All the evidence we have at the moment suggests that adopting a healthy lifestyle throughout your life is the best way to reduce risk of dementia and other long-term health problems. However it's important to remember that it is never too late to start making changes so that you can lead as healthy a life as possible.

Useful Contacts

Age Scotland

Age Scotland is the largest charity in Scotland dedicated to enabling everyone to make the most of later life. We provide information for people through our publications and online.

www.agescotland.org.uk

Silver Line Scotland

Silver Line Scotland is the confidential, free-phone helpline for older people in Scotland, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Silver Line Scotland is delivered by Age Scotland in partnership with The Silver Line. It provides information, friendship and advice to older people and those seeking advice on how best to support older friends and family members.

Tel: **0800 4 70 80 90**

www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/about-us/silver_line_scotland

Alzheimer Scotland

Alzheimer Scotland is the leading dementia organisation in Scotland. It campaigns for the rights of people with dementia and their families and provides an extensive range of innovative and personalised support services.

Freephone 24 Hour Dementia Helpline: **0808 808 3000**

Email: **info@alzscot.org**

www.alzscot.org



Being Dementia Aware

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Age Scotland, part of the Age Network, is an independent charity dedicated to improving the later lives of everyone on the ageing journey, within a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland. Registration Number 153343. Charity Number SC010100.