

# Can I Prevent Dementia?

From the Alzhiemers Website

<https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/can-i-prevent-dementia>

As you age, you may have concerns about the increased risk of dementia. You may have questions, too. Are there steps I can take to prevent it? Is there anything I can do to reduce my risk? There are currently no approaches that have been proven to 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.

## What Are Risk Factors?

A risk factor is something that may increase the chance of developing a disease. 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's behind these differences.

However, people do have control over their behavior and lifestyle, which can influence their risk for certain diseases. For example, high blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease. Lowering blood pressure with lifestyle changes or medication can help reduce a person's risk for heart disease and heart attack.

To determine which risk factors may prevent a disease or condition, researchers first conduct observational studies to make associations. They then conduct carefully controlled clinical trials. For example, researchers identified an association between high blood pressure and heart attacks and then completed clinical trials to determine that lowering a person's blood pressure would indeed lower the likelihood of having a heart attack. This is not to say that people who lower their blood pressure definitely won't have a heart attack. But it significantly lowers the chances.

For Alzheimer's and related dementias, no behavior or lifestyle factors have risen to the level of researchers being able to say: This will definitely prevent these diseases. But there are promising avenues.

## What Do We Know About Reducing Risk for Dementia?

The number of older Americans is rising, so the number of people with dementia is predicted to increase. However, some studies have shown that incidence rates of dementia — meaning new cases in a population over a certain period of time — have decreased in some locations, including in the United States. Based on observational

studies, factors such as healthy lifestyle behaviors and higher levels of education may be contributing to such a decline. But the cause and effect is uncertain, and such factors need to be tested in a clinical trial to prove whether they can prevent dementia.

A [review of published research](#) evaluated the evidence from clinical trials on behavior and lifestyle changes to prevent or delay Alzheimer's or age-related cognitive decline. The review found "encouraging but inconclusive" evidence for three types of behavioral changes (called interventions): physical activity, blood pressure control, and cognitive training. The findings mean that interventions in these areas are promising enough that researchers should keep studying them to learn more. Researchers continue to explore these and other interventions to determine whether — and in what amounts or forms — they might prevent dementia.

## What Can You Do?

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, such as exercising and quitting smoking, 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, getting regular exercise, stopping smoking, 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. Being active and choosing healthy foods can help maintain a healthy weight.
- **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 limit other fats and sugars.
- **Keep physically active.** Physical activity has many health benefits, such as helping to prevent being overweight and having obesity, heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure. 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 from loud sounds to help 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. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), part of the National Institutes of Health, recommends that men should not have more than two drinks a day and women only one. Learn more at [NIAAA's Rethinking Drinking website](#).
- **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.

### Watch Out for False Alzheimer's Cures

Although you might see commercials or online advertisements for products promising to improve brain health and prevent dementia, be cautious about such products. There currently is no product that will effectively prevent or treat Alzheimer's or related dementias. Check with your doctor before trying any new medication or supplement.

### What's Next With Dementia Prevention Research?

More research is needed to find ways to help prevent Alzheimer's and related dementias. Future research may determine that specific interventions are needed to prevent or delay the disease in some people, but others may need a combination of treatments based on their individual risk factors. Understanding risk factors and choices you can make now is important for both your present and future health. In addition to this website, consider the resources listed below to learn more.

You can also help researchers learn more about preventing dementia by participating in clinical trials and studies. Search the [Alzheimers.gov Clinical Trials Finder](#) to find studies that need volunteers.