

Lowering the risk of developing dementia (in retirement)

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Reducing the risk of developing dementia involves understanding both the factors that contribute to its onset and the strategies that can help mitigate these risks. While certain factors, like age, gender, and genetics, are beyond our control, there are many aspects of our lifestyle and environment that we can influence to lower our chances of developing this condition.

Aging is the most significant risk factor for dementia, with older individuals being more susceptible. Additionally, women are at a higher risk than men, and some genetic factors can increase the likelihood of developing dementia. While these factors cannot be changed, they do not tell the whole story. There are several modifiable risk factors—those we can do something about—that play a crucial role in the development of dementia.

One of the most effective ways to reduce dementia risk is by leading a healthy lifestyle (*Phy*). This includes avoiding smoking and limiting alcohol consumption, as both habits are linked to an increased risk of dementia. Regular physical activity is also essential, though it's important to avoid sports that involve repetitive head trauma, such as boxing or American football, which can increase the risk of cognitive decline. A healthy diet is another key factor; consuming plenty of fruits, vegetables, and fish while minimizing processed foods and sugary drinks can significantly reduce the risk.

Beyond lifestyle choices, managing health conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and high LDL cholesterol is critical. These conditions are known to contribute to the development of dementia, so regular monitoring and treatment are vital. Additionally, addressing sensory impairments, such as hearing loss and vision problems, can make a significant difference. For example, using hearing aids has been shown to reduce the risk of dementia in individuals with hearing loss.

Cognitive engagement is another important strategy for mitigating dementia risk. Activities that stimulate the brain, such as learning a new language, playing a musical instrument, or doing puzzles (*Int*), can help maintain cognitive function and delay the onset of dementia. Social factors also play a role; maintaining an active social life (*Soc*) and pursuing higher levels of education (*Int*) can lower the risk, while social isolation and depression (*Emo*) are recognized as contributing factors.

Finally, environmental factors, such as air pollution (*Env*), also impact dementia risk. Exposure to fine particles, particularly those found in polluted air, has been linked to an increased risk of dementia. While completely avoiding air pollution may be difficult, minimizing exposure where possible can be beneficial.

In summary, while we cannot change certain risk factors like age and genetics, there are many steps we can take to reduce our risk of developing dementia. By adopting a healthy lifestyle, managing medical conditions (*Phy*), staying cognitively engaged (*Int*), and considering social and environmental factors (*Soc*, *Env*, *Emo*), we can significantly lower our chances of facing this challenging condition in later life.