



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Reducing the risk of dementia in mid-life

Information for patients

This leaflet is for people in mid-life and suggests ways you may be able to reduce the risk of developing dementia in later life.

What is dementia?

Dementia is a worsening condition affecting a person's brain and understanding, to the point where they are unable to live day-to-day without assistance. There are lots of different types of dementia, but the most common are Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and frontotemporal dementia.

How common is dementia?

There are currently over 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK, and the number is rising. It is most commonly diagnosed in people aged over 65, although it is possible to develop the condition earlier – called 'young or early onset' dementia.

What causes dementia?

The different types of dementia have different underlying causes, but all lead to the loss of the cells and connections within the brain. In Alzheimer's disease, for example, the cells die as a result of an abnormal build-up of protein. Whereas, in vascular dementia, the cells are damaged as the result of a loss of blood supply, caused typically by strokes or transient ischaemic attacks (TIAs).

How can I reduce my risk of developing dementia?

Although there are some forms of dementia which have underlying genetic causes (i.e. they run in families), there is increasing evidence that making certain lifestyle changes in middle age can reduce your risk of developing dementia when you get older. The earlier a person makes these changes the better, but it is never too late in life to make alterations.

Smoking

Smoking can increase your risk of developing dementia by around 30-50%. This is as a direct result of toxins from smoking damaging the brain – associated with Alzheimer’s disease. Smoking is also associated with an increased risk of strokes and TIAs, which can lead to vascular dementia. If you stop smoking, your overall risk of developing dementia gradually returns to that of people who have never smoked. If you would like help to stop smoking, there are support services available both at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and in the community. Visit: www.smokefreelifeberkshire.com/ for advice.

Alcohol consumption

Drinking more than 14 units of alcohol a week can lead to an increased risk of dementia. In those drinking significantly more than the recommended weekly levels (more than 50 units for men, more than 35 units for women), this risk is increased through alcohol-related brain damage. As with smoking, this can be the direct result of the toxic effect of alcohol, but also via indirect routes, such as thiamine deficiency, or the increased risk of stroke and heart disease. Your GP will be able to direct you to appropriate help and support if you would like help with stopping or cutting down your drinking.

Keeping healthy

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and regular exercise can reduce your risk of developing dementia and other conditions related to increased dementia risk, such as Type 2 diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. For advice on a healthy, balanced diet, visit www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/

Recommended weekly exercise levels are:

- 150 minutes / week of moderate exercise such as brisk walking, or
- 75 minutes / week of vigorous exercise such as running.

Keeping your mind active

There is increasing evidence that maintaining an active and stimulated brain can reduce your chances of developing dementia in future. Being socially active and talking, playing or listening to music, board games and puzzles, all stimulate multiple areas of the brain and require concentration. These activities may help reduce your risk of developing dementia in future.

Is there anything else I can do?

Since other chronic conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, can lead to increased risks of stroke and heart disease, and – in turn – dementia, it is important to make sure such conditions are well controlled and treated when possible. Even if you don't have a chronic condition, if you are aged between 40-74, you are eligible for a health check with your GP every five years. Attending these check-ups will increase the chance of early detection of any underlying conditions, and hence early intervention to reduce the risk of future complications, such as dementia. Ask at your GP surgery about a five-year check-up.

Further information on dementia

- The Alzheimer's Society www.alzheimers.org.uk
Helpline: 0300 222 1122
- Dementia UK www.dementiauk.org
Telephone: 0207 6974160 Email: info@dementiauk.org
- Age UK Berkshire www.ageuk.org.uk/berkshire/our-services/dementia-support
Telephone: 0118 959 4242 Email: info@ageukberkshire.org.uk

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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