



Dementia - How not to get it

In a retirement community, many of our patients worry about developing dementia (a disorder of thinking AND memory) as they grow older. Most dementia is caused by either **Alzheimer's disease** (a neurogenerative disorder) or **Vascular disease** causing mini strokes which destroy brain tissue. As with many illnesses there are things you can do something about and things you can't.

The things you can't do anything about include being female, growing older and having a family history of Alzheimer's. However, things you can do something about are estimated, when combined, to account to more than 50% of Alzheimer's disease risk.

1. **Use it or lose it.** Lifelong learning and cognitive leisure activities (crossword puzzles, playing cards, computer use, arts and crafts, taking classes, group discussion and listening to music) have been associated with reduced risk of Alzheimer's in clinical studies.
2. **Keep as fit as you possibly can.** Depending on the type of exercise and its intensity, physical exercise may lower Alzheimer's risk by up to 65%.
3. **Eat well.** Healthy diet with recommended servings of fruit and vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and avoiding processed food also reduces Alzheimer's risk.

Unsurprisingly 2&3 above also decrease your risk of vascular disease, the second major cause of dementia.

Much effort is focused on coming up with a pharmaceutical cure for dementia, but the facts are that current drugs do not bring a great deal of benefit to most patients and curative drugs are some way off. So, the old medical adage that prevention is better than cure really seems to be true for Alzheimer's.

Eat well, exercise your body and your brain, don't smoke and don't drink too much, these are the keys to preventing dementia and many other diseases affecting the elderly - simple in theory and not too difficult for most people - but hard for some.

Talk to your doctor for more specific advice about what you can do for yourself as you age.

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