

Attitude towards age increases risk of dementia diagnosis

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Our attitude towards our age has a massive impact on the likelihood of being diagnosed with dementia. New research shows that when seniors see themselves as 'older' their performance on a standard dementia screening test declines dramatically; making them five times more likely to meet the criteria for dementia.

The research, conducted by the University of Exeter, highlights the significance of our age perceptions and its effect on our mental functioning. It is presented today at the first International Conference on [Social Identity](#) and Health. Hosted by the University of Exeter, the conference will cover community and public health, health in India, stress and [resilience](#), and aging and dementia.

The research involved 68 people aged between 60 and 70 years, who were primed to either feel older or younger than others taking part in the study. Those in the 'older' group were told the participants ranged in age from 40 to 70, encouraging them to think of themselves as being at the upper end of the age spectrum, while those in the 'younger' group were told that participants ages ranged from 60 to 90 years, encouraging them to think of themselves at the lower end of the age spectrum. All participants were then given one of two articles to read, which either focused on the effects of age on [memory loss](#) or on the impact of ageing on general cognitive ability.

The participants then completed a series of standard [clinical tests](#) that included a standard dementia screening test, the Addenbrooke's

Cognitive Examination-Revised. 70 per cent of people who were encouraged to see themselves as older and to believe that aging was associated with a general decline in ability, met the criterion for dementia. This was compared to an average of 14 per cent in the other groups.

The tests used in the study are the same as those used in memory clinics and GP surgeries to assist in dementia diagnosis. Therefore, the participants' sense of their own age had a major impact on widely-established clinical tools.

Lead author Dr Catherine Haslam of the University of Exeter said: "Our research shows that the effect of age perceptions on performance can be dramatic, and that seeing oneself as 'older' significantly increases a person's risk of being diagnosed with dementia on such tests. It highlights the importance of taking a person's attitude towards their [age](#) into account when assessing for [dementia](#)."

Provided by University of Exeter

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