

New figures show only 25% of British adults think dementia risk can be reduced

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A leading dementia expert is calling for greater public awareness of the risk factors for dementia, following a new poll showing only a quarter of British adults think it is possible to reduce their risk of developing the condition.

In his opening speech to the Alzheimer's Research UK Conference in Manchester today, Prof Alistair Burns, National Clinical Director for Dementia at NHS England, will highlight the potential for a healthy lifestyle to help lower their risk of dementia and call for messages about risk reduction to be promoted to the public. Addressing the largest gathering of dementia researchers in the country, Prof Burns will also urge more research into ways to prevent the devastating condition.

Dementia affects 850,000 people in the UK, with the number currently predicted to rise to more than 1 million by 2025 as the population ages. Currently there are no treatments to stop or slow the progress of Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, but research suggests there are measures people can take that may reduce their risk of dementia. The [risk factors](#) for cardiovascular disease are also risk factors for dementia, and growing evidence has linked a healthy lifestyle to lower dementia risk – with studies suggesting that keeping healthy in mid-life may be particularly important. Lifestyle measures that may lower the risk of dementia include eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, not drinking to excess, not smoking, and keeping blood pressure, weight and cholesterol under control.

New polling data highlights a worrying gap between this evidence and public understanding, showing that few people believe it's possible to reduce their risk of dementia. In a YouGov survey commissioned by Alzheimer's Research UK, the UK's leading dementia research charity, only a quarter (25%) of British adults said they thought it was possible for people to reduce their risk of developing dementia, compared to 83% for diabetes and 82% for heart disease.

But when told that a healthy lifestyle may reduce the risk of dementia, two in five people said they would be more likely to adopt a healthy lifestyle specifically to lower their risk of the condition – with nearly half (48%) of 45-54 year-olds saying they would be more likely to adopt a [healthy lifestyle](#).

Prof Burns said:

"These figures show that public understanding of dementia risk factors is low, and we must work to change that if we are to help reduce the number of people developing the condition. Encouragingly, these figures suggest that when given the right information, many people are motivated to make lifestyle choices to help lower their dementia risk – but currently too few people recognise that they may be able to make an impact. We must arm people with the knowledge they need to make informed choices about their lifestyle, as part of a wider strategy that must also include further research into preventions."

Hilary Evans, Chief Executive of Alzheimer's Research UK, said:

"Although we don't yet have sure-fire preventions for dementia, there are measures people can take now that could lower their risk of the condition. Increasingly, research is showing that what's good for your heart is also good for your head, and with the number of people with dementia on the increase it's vital that this message reaches the public. In

the meantime, research into better prevention strategies will be crucial for scaling up the fight against dementia, along with a focus on new treatments for those cases where dementia cannot be prevented."

Public Health Minister, Jane Ellison, said:

"The latest evidence shows us that making small changes to our lifestyles, such as eating a balanced diet, taking part in regular exercise and quitting smoking can reduce the risk of dementia.

"We will be raising awareness and piloting a new programme discussing risk reduction for dementia in the NHS Health Check with those aged 40 or older – down from 65 currently. We are also working with Alzheimer's Research UK to get more people to take part in dementia research which is so crucial to our shared goal of finding a cure."

Prof Kevin Fenton, Director of Health and Wellbeing at Public Health England, said:

"Developing dementia is not an inevitable part of aging. Making better choices today can have a huge influence on our health and can reduce our risk of living with dementia later down the line. Our new [One You](#) campaign aims to give adults the motivation and support they need to make simple lifestyle changes to improve their health now, and reduce the risk of developing conditions like dementia in the future. This includes things like eating well, moving more, quitting smoking and drinking less."

NHS England, in parallel with the Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia, had an ambition that two thirds of people with dementia should have a diagnosis and post diagnostic support by March 2015. This has now been met. The number of people being diagnosed with dementia has been steadily rising and in March 2015 an estimated 415,964 [people](#)

had been added to the [dementia](#) register, up from 250,000 in 2009. Since March 2014 the numbers have jumped from 349,000 to 432,572 in December 2015.

More information: For more information about how to reduce the risk of dementia, visit www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/about/reducing-the-risk/

Provided by Alzheimer's Research UK

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