

# Does improving cardiovascular health reduce risk of dementia?

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Researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis are recruiting volunteers for a national study that is exploring whether strategies to improve cardiovascular health also reduce the risk of dementia in those at risk for Alzheimer's disease.

The multicenter study is evaluating aerobic exercise, intensive medical management of blood [pressure](#) and cholesterol, and a combination of those approaches in people ages 60 to 85 who are at [risk](#) for Alzheimer's because they have a parent or sibling diagnosed with dementia.

The two-year study seeks to learn whether managing [cardiovascular risk factors](#) might have the added benefit of preventing or delaying the onset of Alzheimer's symptoms in [older adults](#).

"There is a greater risk for Alzheimer's in people with high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol," said Ellen F. Binder, MD, the principal investigator at the study's Washington University clinical site and a professor of medicine in the Division of Geriatrics and Nutritional Science. "These are risk factors we normally associate with cardiovascular disease and stroke, but they can change the brain's vasculature and structure, and that can increase the risk of dementia."

Study volunteers will receive baseline screening tests to determine whether their blood pressure and cholesterol levels are high enough to qualify for the study.

"We are recruiting individuals who need better control of their blood pressure and other cardiovascular risk factors and, as a result, are at risk for Alzheimer's disease," Binder said.

Those who qualify for the study will be randomly assigned to one of four groups: one that receives medications to treat [high blood pressure](#) and cholesterol; one group that receives either a YMCA or Jewish Community Center membership to work with exercise trainers; one that receives both medication and a gym membership; and a control group that receives a home-based exercise program and will continue to have their [blood pressure](#) and cholesterol managed by their [primary care physicians](#).

Older adults with other age-related health problems, such as diabetes or arthritis, may be eligible to participate, provided they are not using insulin and are able to exercise despite any arthritis pain.

Binder explained that the study interventions already are known to improve overall health, regardless of whether they have any effects on Alzheimer's risk.

"The interventions we are studying have proven benefits," Binder said. "Exercise and medication lower risk of heart attack and stroke. We don't know yet whether there may be additional benefits that prevent cognitive decline."

For more information or to volunteer for the study, visit the study's website at [www.rrADtrial.org](http://www.rrADtrial.org) or contact Monica Sewell by calling 314-286-2716 or e-mailing [sewellm@wustl.edu](mailto:sewellm@wustl.edu).

Provided by Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis

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