

Healthy lifestyle may offset genetic risk of dementia

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Living a healthy lifestyle may help offset a person's genetic risk of

dementia, according to new research.

The study was led by the University of Exeter—simultaneously published today in *JAMA* and presented at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference 2019 in Los Angeles. The research found that the risk of [dementia](#) was 32 per cent lower in people with a high genetic risk if they had followed a [healthy lifestyle](#), compared to those who had an [unhealthy lifestyle](#).

Participants with high genetic risk and an unfavourable lifestyle were almost three times more likely to develop dementia compared to those with a low genetic risk and favourable lifestyle.

Joint lead author Dr. Elżbieta Kuśma, at the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "This is the first study to analyse the extent to which you may offset your genetic risk of dementia by living a healthy lifestyle. Our findings are exciting as they show that we can take action to try to offset our genetic risk for dementia. Sticking to a healthy lifestyle was associated with a reduced [risk of dementia](#), regardless of the genetic risk."

The study analysed data from 196,383 adults of European ancestry aged 60 and older from UK Biobank. The researchers identified 1,769 cases of dementia over a follow-up period of eight years. The team grouped the participants into those with high, intermediate and low genetic risk for dementia.

To assess genetic risk, the researchers looked at previously published data and identified all known genetic risk factors for Alzheimer's disease. Each genetic risk factor was weighted according to the strength of its association with Alzheimer's disease.

To assess lifestyle, researchers grouped participants into favourable,

intermediate and unfavourable categories based on their self-reported diet, [physical activity](#), smoking and alcohol consumption. The researchers considered no current smoking, regular physical activity, [healthy diet](#) and moderate alcohol consumption as healthy behaviours. The team found that living a healthy lifestyle was associated with a reduced dementia risk across all genetic risk groups.

Joint lead author Dr. David Llewellyn, from the University of Exeter Medical School and the Alan Turing Institute, said: "This research delivers a really important message that undermines a fatalistic view of dementia. Some people believe it's inevitable they'll develop dementia because of their genetics. However it appears that you may be able to substantially reduce your dementia risk by living a healthy [lifestyle](#)."

More information: Ilianna Lourida et al. Association of Lifestyle and Genetic Risk With Incidence of Dementia, *JAMA* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2019.9879](#)

Provided by University of Exeter

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