

# Important steps to prevent dementia

October 8 2019, by Donna Wilcock

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Alzheimer's disease wreaks emotional havoc on patients, who are robbed of their memories, their dignity, and their lives. It's financially devastating as well: care for Alzheimer's patients is predicted to top \$1 trillion by the time children born today are having children of their own.

More than 70,000 Kentuckians are living with Alzheimer's disease, which likely means that you know someone who has been impacted—directly or indirectly—by dementia. And since that [number](#) is expected to rise to more than 85,000 in the next five years or so, Alzheimer's will likely hit closer to home for many of us.

Dementia refers to the decline of mental ability. Alzheimer's disease is the more prevalent type of dementia, but also fairly common is [vascular dementia](#). Often mislabeled as "senility," it is erroneously believed that dementia is a normal part of aging, when in fact, it is a substantial mental decline that can interfere with a person's ability to perform everyday tasks.

Dementia is a complex disease, and age and genetics can affect your risk. Though we can't change those factors, steps can be taken to reduce your risk.

One of the most important steps is keeping your heart and [blood vessels](#) healthy. Vascular dementia is linked to a lack of oxygen and vital nutrients to the brain. You can protect the network of blood vessels in your brain by quitting tobacco and keeping your [blood pressure](#) and cholesterol in check with a diet of whole grains, fruits, fish and [healthy fats](#).

Keeping your mind and body active can also reduce your risk. Regular physical exercise can reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's and can even slow the mental deterioration in those who have already have problems with memory. Learning a new skill such as dancing, woodworking, making art, a [foreign language](#) or even doing puzzles and playing games can offset your risk. Stay socially active by regularly meeting up with friends or volunteer in your community.

Some medicines and supplements, alone or in combination, can produce

side effects that look like memory loss. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to see whether changes in medication might help reduce these side effects. In addition, while many ads for supplements claim to improve memory and/or prevent [memory loss](#), there is no proof that they are effective.

While there is no cure or surefire prevention for dementia, maintaining a brain-healthy lifestyle can significantly reduce your risk, or even slow or reverse memory problems.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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