

Brain health 'Check-in' tool to help reduce dementia risk

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Credit: Alzheimer's Research UK

A free new digital tool has been launched by Alzheimer's Research UK, supported by evidence from UCL researchers, to help people keep their brain healthy and reduce their dementia risk.

Only 2% of the public are doing everything they can to keep their brains healthy, according to new figures released by the charity.

Now the charity is helping to empower people to look after their brains and reduce their risk of dementia in later life, with the Think Brain Health Check-in. The new tool prompts people to answer a series of evidence-based questions about the factors that research has shown could be influencing their [brain health](#).

According to findings from a major review paper led by Professor Gill Livingston (UCL Psychiatry), up to 40% of dementia cases could be prevented, if 12 [risk factors](#) could be eliminated entirely*. These include smoking, hearing impairment, [high blood pressure](#), physical inactivity, [excessive alcohol consumption](#), diabetes, and infrequent social contact.

However, only a third of people realize that there are steps they can take to reduce their risk of dementia.

According to a YouGov survey, commissioned by Alzheimer's Research UK, a staggering 98% of people have room for improvement when it comes to looking after their [brain](#) health. The survey also revealed:

- While 35% of people said they've had concerns about their hearing, more than half of those (59%) reported that they haven't done anything about it.
- Less than a third (31%) of the public said they get the recommended seven hours of quality sleep a night—the recommended amount for good brain health.
- Over a third of people report that they're failing to challenge their brain regularly, with 32% only managing to do this occasionally, while 4% feel they don't ever challenge their brain. But on a more positive note, over a quarter (27%) believe they are challenging their brain daily.

- People find they're struggling to squeeze in two and a half hours of moderate exercise a week—the NHS recommended amount—with 26% admitting they do this occasionally, while 22% never do this.
- Promisingly, people say they are doing a great job at keeping connected—with 73% of the public speaking to friends, family and colleagues either daily (40%) or several times a week (33%).
- And people appear to be keeping on top of getting their blood pressure checked, with 61% having it looked at over the last year.

The Check-in is based on the latest evidence in [dementia risk](#) reduction and was developed under guidance from an expert group of researchers and members of the public, including UCL Psychiatry's Professor Livingston and Dr. Naaheed Mukadam, as well as Professor Jonathan Schott (UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology), who is also Alzheimer's Research UK's Chief Medical Officer.

It takes around 10 minutes to complete. At the end, the tool highlights the areas where people are doing well, as well as giving them tips on areas where they can be doing more to look after their brains and ultimately, it is hoped, lower their chances of developing dementia.

The Check-in covers everything from [physical activity](#) to [healthy diet](#), as well as factors like hearing, sleep, cognitive challenge and mental well-being. While people of all ages are encouraged to take the Check-in, it's primarily aimed at adults in their 40s and 50s. This is because research tells us that this is a particularly important window for taking action to look after our brain health and reduce our risk of dementia.

Professor Schott said, "We hope the Think Brain Health Check-in will show people that there are things that can be done to improve their brain health, and provide a practical and easy means to allow them to take action to reduce their risk of dementia."

"While there are no sure-fire ways to prevent dementia yet—risk is likely to relate to a combination of our age, genetics and lifestyle—evidence has shown that there are steps we can all take to improve our brain health. Currently only a third of people realize this is possible, and we urgently need to change that. It's never too early or too late in life to start looking after your brain—so please do take the Check-in today and see what you can do to improve your brain health."

Hilary Evans, Chief Executive of Alzheimer's Research UK, said, "It's time for the nation to wake up to the idea of brain health and how looking after our brains can reduce the risk of dementia. The fact that 98% of people have room to improve their brain [health](#) highlights the huge potential of Alzheimer's Research UK's new Think Brain Health Check-in to help transform lives."

"The Check-in gives people the information they need at their fingertips on how to keep their brains healthy and reduce their [risk of dementia](#) later on in life. As the UK's leading [dementia](#) research charity, we want to empower people to take action when it comes to their brain and that's why we're calling on people to take the Check-in."

More information: Check-in Tool: www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/b...ain-health/check-in/

Provided by University College London

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