

Preventing Alzheimer's: Here's 6 ways you may reduce your risk

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Alzheimer's robs its victims of their memories and there is no cure, but

there are things you can do to prevent Alzheimer's disease.

With Alzheimer's, two types of brain proteins, called tau tangles and beta-amyloid plaques, grow out of control. According to Harvard Health, these proteins destroy [brain cells](#) and cause [symptoms](#) like confusion, memory loss and personality changes.

Yet, there are many preventive measures that can be taken to reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer's. Here are six ways you can help prevent this debilitating condition and protect your brain health.

How to prevent Alzheimer's

Exercise

According to [Alzheimer's Society UK](#), the results of 11 studies revealed that Alzheimer's risk was reduced by 45% for [middle-aged people](#) who exercised regularly. Older people have also been scientifically shown to benefit from exercise, which helps improve memory and thinking.

While the reasons exercise is so beneficial for reducing Alzheimer's risk are still being researched, one study published in [Nature Metabolism](#) points to a hormone called irisin that's released during physical activity. The researchers showed that this hormone has [positive effects](#) on cognition and nerve inflammation in the brain.

"The most convincing evidence is that physical exercise helps prevent the development of Alzheimer's or slow the progression in people who have symptoms," Dr. Gad Marshall, director of clinical trials at Brigham & Women's Center for Alzheimer Research and Treatment, said in a recent [article](#).

"The recommendation is 30 minutes of moderately vigorous aerobic

exercise, three to four days per week," he advised.

Stop smoking

There are chemical toxins in cigarettes that can increase brain inflammation, cause vascular bleeding and add stress to cells, which are all tied to Alzheimer's disease development. In fact, the [Alzheimer's Society UK](#) notes that a series of systematic reviews found smoking may increase Alzheimer's risk by 30% to 50%.

To help you quit smoking, the [National Institute on Aging](#) (NIA) offers the following tips:

- Use support products like nicotine replacement patches or doctor-prescribed medications
- Make an exercise plan
- Use the money you save on quitting on a rewards system
- Ask for help from loved ones
- Try individual or group therapy
- Download [quit-smoking apps](#) for motivation and educational tips

Eat a healthy diet

Marshall said that eating a Mediterranean diet "has been shown to help thwart Alzheimer's or slow its progression."

One NIA-funded study published recently in the journal [Neurology](#) revealed that both the Mediterranean and MIND diets (Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) helped reduce the signs of Alzheimer's disease and lowered amyloid plaque levels in the brain.

These diets consist of foods like:

- Whole grains
- Green leafy vegetables
- Fish
- Beans
- Olive oil
- Nuts

Manage your heart health

Both the [Alzheimer's Association](#) and the [NIA](#) point out that factors such as [high blood pressure](#), high cholesterol and diabetes, which increase your risk of developing cardiovascular disease, also increase your Alzheimer's risk.

In fact, a recent meta-analysis of six studies published in [The Lancet Neurology](#) showed that people taking low blood pressure medication cut their Alzheimer's disease risk by one-third.

To control your blood pressure, try these tips from the [NIA](#):

- Create a [heart-healthy diet](#) plan
- Reduce your salt intake because [blood pressure](#) becomes more salt-sensitive with age
- Drink alcohol in moderation (no more than one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men)
- Avoid smoking
- Exercise about 150 minutes per week

Stay socially connected

"We think that greater social contact helps prevent Alzheimer's, [but right now] there is only information from [observational studies](#)," said Marshall.

While the reasons why socializing helps cut your risk are still unclear, the Alzheimer's Association says that [social connections](#) may shore up nerve cell connections in the brain, making memory and thinking flow more smoothly.

Need some suggestions for staying connected? The [NIA](#) has a few ideas:

- Reach out to family, friends, or other trusted community members at least once a day
- Check out volunteer opportunities in your area
- Take a class in an area that interests you
- Adopt a pet
- Start up a hobby again that you've set aside

Get a good night's rest

"Growing evidence suggests that improved sleep can help prevent Alzheimer's and is linked to greater amyloid clearance from the brain," Marshall explained.

A study in Britain published recently in the journal [Nature Communications](#) tracked the behavior of almost 8,000 people over the course of 20 years, starting when they were 50. Compared with people who slept seven hours a night in their 50s and 60s, those who slept six hours or less a night were [30% more likely](#) to be diagnosed with dementia.

The [Sleep Foundation](#) offers some great tips on getting more sleep, such as:

- Shut off technology an hour before bed
- Follow a consistent bedtime routine
- Reduce caffeine intake

If you'd like to learn more about how to prevent Alzheimer's disease, take a look at [Understanding Alzheimer's Disease: What You Need to Know](#), developed by the NIA.

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