

What you can do now to prevent memory loss

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For many, minor memory loss, sometimes referred to as a senior moment, is a normal part of aging. However, more significant memory loss that disrupts your life can be an early sign of dementia. Older adults

are at risk for dementia and both the prevalence and incidence of dementia grow with increasing age. Though 3% of older adults between 65 and 69 years of age have evidence of dementia, 35% of those 90 years of age and older have dementia.

Dementia is a progressive neurological condition that impacts memory, particularly short-term memory. As the illness progresses it affects other parts of cognitive function including comprehension, speech and judgment. It can also affect behavior and in its later phases can affect motor functions such as balance, walking and swallowing.

So much of what makes each of us unique as human beings has to do with our remarkable brains and normal cognitive function. Our ability to managing our finances, work, drive a car, go shopping and prepare meals. Our ability to read, write, speak and understand what others are saying. Our ability to connect emotionally with those we love and those who love us.

It's never too early or too late to start thinking about protecting our brains. Research shows that taking steps to improve our health at any age can be especially important in helping lower our risk of developing [dementia](#) in later life. There are many ways to help prevent or delay memory loss and Dr. Patrick P. Coll, medical director for Senior Health at UConn Health shares some of those with us.

What's good for your heart is good for your brain

One of the biggest impacts of delaying [memory loss](#) is managing cardiovascular diseases and preventing cardiovascular health issues because there is a strong connection between [heart health](#) and [brain health](#).

The brain is nourished by one of the body's richest networks of [blood](#)

[vessels](#). With every beat, the heart pumps 20% to 25% of the blood to the head, where [brain cells](#) use at least 20% of the food and oxygen carried by the blood in order to function normally. As a result, many factors that damage the heart or blood vessels may also damage the brain—and may increase the risk of developing dementia.

Being active helps to prevent many health conditions and it's key to keeping your brain working properly too. It can help you maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and [heart disease](#). Both are known risk factors for dementia. I tell my patients that though work around the house, including yard work counts, dedicated time for exercise is important. Walking as little as one mile a day can make a difference. Much like physical activity, a heart healthy diet is an important way to reach and maintain cardiovascular health.

Regulating your blood pressure

High blood pressure, or hypertension, especially in midlife, has been shown to be associated with a higher risk of cognitive decline. It is important to make sure you have your blood pressure checked regularly and speak with your health care provider about making changes through lifestyle interventions and for some patients taking medications to control your blood pressure.

Preventing and managing diabetes

Diabetes is a condition that causes your blood sugar level to become too high and is known to affect brain health. Prevention of diabetes is key, but for those who have diabetes, management of the disease to keep it under control to protect your brain and yourself against dementia. The main goal of diabetes management is to reduce the risk of complications and diabetes-related diseases. Some ways to manage diabetes include

healthy eating, [physical activity](#), blood sugar monitoring, medication, stress management, foot care, dental hygiene, smoking cessation, blood pressure, and cholesterol control.

Preventing head injuries

Preventing head injuries, particularly recurrent [head injuries](#) common in [contact sports](#) starts at a very young age to protect brain function.

Protection of adults and children who are participating in contact sports from either a serious head injury or recurrent injuries that could put them at risk for cognitive function dysfunction including dementia when they're older is important.

Smoking and alcohol use

There are many good reasons not to smoke cigarettes, and you can add preventing dementia to the list. As well as being linked to [high blood pressure](#), heart disease, stroke, and cancer, there's evidence that smoking increases your risk of dementia, particularly Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Avoiding excess alcohol intake is another health precaution to prevent memory issues.

Hearing loss

There is a bidirectional association between hearing impairment and dementia, it's recognized that hearing loss is a risk factor for dementia, and it's also recognized that patients with dementia are at increased risk for hearing-related issues.

Hearing loss is a risk factor for dementia so protecting yourself against

hearing loss is an important lifelong intervention of protecting your ears from excessive levels of sound and noise. There are increasing concerns about children and young adults being exposed to hearing high levels of sound through earbuds and headphones.

If you have a hearing impairment, optimizing your hearing through an audiology evaluation and potentially hearing aids can decrease your risk of dementia.

Social engagement

During COVID-19 we saw the importance of social engagement for [older adults](#) who were not interacting with their families and friends, or participating in various other social settings such as senior centers which took a big toll on physical, mental, and cognitive health. Your brain needs to be activated as much as possible and it's important that people go to cultural events, and interact with family and friends, those kinds of activities where your brain is engaged are very positive for overall brain health including potentially decreasing your risk of developing dementia.

"I would encourage everyone to have a conversation with their primary care provider about general wellness and what they can do to prevent or decrease their risk of dementia," says Coll. "When asked by patients about crossword puzzles and sudoku, I'd say by all means that they are good to do, however, don't forget a heart-[healthy diet](#), good [blood pressure](#) control, physical exercise, [social engagement](#), and good hearing; it's a combination of approaches."

Provided by University of Connecticut

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