

Exercise may lessen fall risk for older adults with Alzheimer's

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Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a brain disease that causes changes that kill brain cells. AD is a type of dementia, which causes memory loss and problems with thinking and making decisions. People with AD and other

forms of dementia have difficulties performing the daily activities others might consider routine.

Dementia takes a toll on those who live with it—and it also places a burden on caregivers. Along with problems connected to memory, language, and decision-making, [dementia](#) can cause [neuropsychiatric symptoms](#), such as depression, anxiety, changes in mood, increased irritability, and changes in personality and behavior. People who have AD/dementia also have twice the risk for falls compared to people without dementia. About 60 percent of [older adults](#) with dementia fall each year.

Researchers suggest that having neuropsychiatric symptoms might predict whether an older person with AD/dementia is more likely to have a fall. We also know that [exercise](#) can reduce the number of falls in older adults with dementia. However, we don't know very much about how neuropsychiatric symptoms may increase the risk of falls, and we know even less about how exercise may reduce the risk of falls for people with dementia and neuropsychiatric symptoms. A research team decided to explore whether exercise could reduce the risk of falling among community-dwelling people with AD who also had neuropsychiatric symptoms.

To learn more, the researchers reviewed a study that investigated the effects of an exercise program for older adults with AD (the FINALEX trial). The study included a range of people living with different stages of AD/dementia and with neuropsychiatric symptoms. Their findings were published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

The original FINALEX study examined and compared older adults who had home- or group-based exercise training with people who didn't exercise but who received regular care. The researchers learned that the people who exercised had a lower risk for falls than those who didn't

exercise. There was also a higher risk for falls among those who had lower scores on psychological tests and who didn't exercise.

This study revealed that people with AD/dementia and neuropsychiatric symptoms such as depression and anxiety have a higher risk for falls. Exercise can reduce the risk of falling for older adults with these symptoms. Further studies are needed to confirm these results.

More information: Hanna-Maria Roitto et al, Relationship of Neuropsychiatric Symptoms with Falls in Alzheimer's Disease - Does Exercise Modify the Risk?, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.15614](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.15614)

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