

Healthy lifestyle behaviors reduced dementia risk despite family history of dementia

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Adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors can lower dementia risk among people who are at higher risk due to a family history of dementia, according to preliminary research to be presented at the American Heart Association's Epidemiology, Prevention, Lifestyle & Cardiometabolic Health Conference 2021.

Familial dementia is a strong risk factor for dementia. Having a first-degree relative such as a parent or sibling with the disease can increase a person's risk of dementia by nearly 75% compared to someone who does not have a first-degree relative with the condition. Other common risk factors for dementia include age, sex, race, education, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes and depression.

"When dementia runs in a family both genetics and non-genetic factors, such as dietary patterns, [physical activity](#) and smoking status, affect an individual's overall risk," said study author Angeliqe Brellenthin, Ph.D., assistant professor of

kinesiology at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. "This means there may be opportunities for reducing risk by addressing those non-[genetic factors](#)."

Brellenthin and colleagues analyzed [health information](#) on 302,239 men and women, ages 50-73 years, who completed a baseline [physical examination](#) between 2006-2010 as part of the UK Biobank Study, which is a large study encompassing over 500,000 people in the United Kingdom. The adults were free of dementia at the beginning of the study and filled out questionnaires about family history and [lifestyle](#). Participants were given one point for each of six healthy lifestyle behaviors they followed, including:

- Eating a healthy diet with more fruits and vegetables, and less processed meat and refined grains;
- Meeting physical activity guidelines of 150 or more minutes a week of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity;
- Sleeping 6 to 9 hours each day;
- Drinking alcohol in moderation;
- Not smoking; and
- Not having obesity, meaning they had a BMI (body mass index) of

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