

# Dementia Risk Lowered by Six Habits, Study Suggests

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Adopting six simple lifestyle habits could significantly reduce your risk of dementia, scientists have said. Dementia affects over 5 million American adults. The condition comes in different forms—the most common of which is Alzheimer's disease—and is characterized by an impaired ability to remember, think and make decisions. The condition occurs when **cells in the brain and the connections between stop working properly**. And this can result from a combination of factors. Certain genetic variants may increase our risk of developing dementia, but our lifestyle and habits also appear to play a significant role.

Numerous studies have highlighted a link between **cardiometabolic diseases—such as heart disease, stroke, hypertension and type 2 diabetes—with accelerated cognitive decline**. But whether this can be offset by a healthy lifestyle has previously been unclear. In a new study, published in the Journal of Affective Disorders, researchers from Beijing examined 2,537 participants over the age of 60. Participants were given a physical examination to determine their weight, height and blood pressure, as well as tests for cognitive function and cardiometabolic diseases. Finally, they were surveyed on their **adherence to six lifestyle factors** which had previously been identified to support brain health: **physical exercise, social interaction, leisure activities, sleep quality, smoking status and alcohol consumption**. Each participant was given an overall lifestyle score in which each of these factors contributed one point.

In total, the team found that each one-point increase in the participants' overall lifestyle score was associated with an 18 percent reduced risk of early cognitive decline. This cumulative scoring system suggests that a combination of lifestyle factors, rather than any single factor, may be responsible for this slowed rate of cognitive decline.

*"A healthier lifestyle is associated with a significant reduced risk of early cognitive decline, but lifestyle changes can't be piecemeal,"* the study's joint lead authors, Haowei Li of the National Clinical Research Center for Geriatrics Diseases, and Shige Qi from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said in a statement.

*"The most beneficial protective effect is seen when clustering multiple lifestyle factors together, showing just how powerful exercise, socializing, sleeping, and healthy consumption habits are in combination."*

## New Hope for Early Dementia Detection

Another recently published study has suggested **a new method for detecting dementia five to 10 years before symptoms start to develop**. Researchers from the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio—together with colleagues from the University of California, Davis, and Boston University—studied MRI scans from 1,500 participants aged between the ages of 70 and 74.

From this data, the team saw that **a ribbon of brain tissues, known as cortical gray matter, grows thinner** in those who go on to develop dementia, and appears to be an accurate biomarker of the disease long before the development of symptoms. This discovery offers hope to millions of people across the U.S. as early diagnosis is essential for effective treatment and slowing the disease progression.