

[IMAGE]

## Preventing Dementia: 12 Tips

By Editorial Staff

Are 40 percent of dementia cases attributable to a mere 12 risk factors? Yes, say experts, and even more importantly, many of the factors are modifiable. That means *you* have the power to shape your life in a way that helps you avoid dementia – or at least dramatically reduce your risk.

A 2020 report from the *Lancet* Commission on Dementia Prevention, Intervention, and Care adds three modifiable risk factors to the nine noted in its 2017 report. All 12 are supported by "a growing body of evidence," according to the commission. The original nine are as follows, plus the three additional factors added to the 2020 report (bottom three of list):

1. High blood pressure
2. Hearing impairment
3. Smoking
4. Depression
5. Obesity
6. Physical inactivity
7. Diabetes
8. Low social contact
9. Less education
10. Excessive alcohol consumption
11. Traumatic brain injury
12. Air pollution

Now obviously, some of the above risk factors are more modifiable than others. After all, whether you suffer hearing impairment or a traumatic brain injury often isn't under your control (although you can modify your lifestyle to reduce your risk of experiencing them; for example, by listening to music at a safe level or not playing sports with a high concussion risk). Air pollution affects us all, although your work and home life may affect it to a larger or smaller extent (e.g., certain jobs; city vs. rural living). And while

family income, where you live and other variables may impact education (at least whether or not you attend college), those limitations can be overcome.

(Some of these risk factors may not be modifiable on an individual level, either; government programs to ensure primary / secondary education, reduce air pollution and make contact sports safer, for example, are also critical.)

The other eight risk factors are under your control in the vast majority of cases: whether you smoke, how much you drink, your physical activity (which impacts obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and depression) and your social network. Your eating habits also play a significant role in how some of these risk factors play out as well – an unhealthy diet can lead to obesity, high BP, diabetes and depression. Obesity also may make you less likely to socialize.

So, as you can see, many of the factors are intertwined, in the sense that if you modify one risk factor, you'll likely modify several others in the process, and vice-versa. The bottom line is no one wants to experience dementia. You may not be able to prevent it, but why not do everything you can to reduce your risk? As you can see, for the most part it's very much in your power to do so.

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