

[IMAGE]

## Lifestyle Tops Aging

By Editorial Staff

Have you ever seen a person who looks really old – and then found out he / she isn't that old at all? Or perhaps the reverse: someone who's in the twilight of life in terms of age – but looks as if the end is far from near? One big reason: lifestyle tops aging, and it's no more true than when we consider how lifestyle influences dementia risk.

Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are often viewed as diseases of aging, but that doesn't mean age is the only factor affecting if, when and to what extent you'll experience cognitive decline. Research published in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment, and Disease Monitoring* (a journal of the Alzheimer's Association) reveals that various age-independent lifestyle factors increase dementia risk.

Among 22,000-plus adults (spanning a wide age range: 18-89), memory and attention test performance (two common indicators of cognitive decline) was influenced by eight modifiable risk factors: low education, hearing loss, traumatic brain injury (TBI), alcohol or substance abuse, high blood pressure, smoking (current smoker or within four years), diabetes and depression. The presence of each factor was associated with a reduction in cognitive performance equivalent to up to three years of aging; for example, having two factors meant up to six years of decline.

While these results were independent of age, suggesting that lifestyle indeed tops aging when it comes to brain health / cognitive decline, the effects of the risk factors, and the number of risk factors, did increase with age. But all that really means is that regardless of how old you are, limiting these risk factors (or avoiding all eight, if possible) could hold the key to keeping your brain sharp for a lifetime.

Obviously a few of these factors aren't quite so "modifiable" as others, but in many cases, all eight are the result of decisions we make; particularly smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes and alcohol / substance abuse. In fact, in some cases, even hearing loss and TBI are under our control; for example, perpetually listening to loud music or riding a bike without a helmet, respectively. Talk to your doctor for more information about healthy aging – body *and* brain.

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