

Memory Moment

Medical Conditions that may raise risk continued

People often ask us "Is there any way to prevent dementia?" While there is a lot we still don't know about these diseases, research is developing ways to reduce the risk of dementia as well as many other chronic diseases. Over the last several months, we have written a series of articles that focused on various strategies for better health.

This is the second section that discusses other medical conditions that may raise your risk for dementia and what you can do to help manage them and reduce your risk.

High Blood Pressure or hypertension – Untreated high blood pressure can lead to dementia. We have talked a little about high blood pressure in the diet and exercise articles, but we will go a little more in depth here.

Blood pressure measures the force applied to your arteries as blood is circulated around the body by the heart. A normal blood pressure reading is around 120/80 mmHg.

High blood pressure at any age may speed up cognitive decline according to a study published by the American Heart Association in December, 2020.

Researchers found that even slightly elevated blood pressure in middle age or older was linked to faster cognitive decline. But they also found that effectively treating high blood pressure at any age in adulthood could reduce or prevent faster cognitive decline. According to the CDC, nearly half of adults have high blood pressure. Only one in four American adults with high blood pressure have their condition under control!

Ways to reduce risk: 1) eat a Mediterranean diet or DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, poultry, fish and nuts, 2) losing an average of 11 pounds shaved 4.4 points of systolic blood pressure and 3.6 points of diastolic blood pressure, 3) monitor your blood pressure at home to improve blood pressure management and 4) take your medications to lower blood pressure.

Diabetes or high blood sugar – Alzheimer’s disease has sometimes been called “type 3 diabetes” because of a 56% increased risk among people living with type 2 diabetes. According to the American Diabetes Association, 25% of people age 65 and older in the United States have diabetes (diagnosed or undiagnosed) and about half have prediabetes.

According to the Alzheimer’s Association, high blood sugar or insulin can harm the brain in several ways:

*Diabetes raises the risk of heart disease and stroke, which hurt the heart and blood vessels. Damaged blood vessels in the brain may contribute to cognitive decline.

*The brain depends on many different chemicals, which may be unbalanced by too much insulin. Some of these changes may help trigger cognitive decline.

*High blood sugar causes inflammation. This may damage brain cells and cause dementia to develop.

People that have Type 1 diabetes have a greater risk of dementia than people that have normal blood sugar levels. One study found that people with high blood sugar levels had a dramatic increase in beta-amyloid protein, a possible cause of Alzheimer’s disease. Researchers found that even people who had diabetes for less than 10 years had memory deficits and smaller hippocampal size. The hippocampus is where Alzheimer’s disease usually starts.

Ways to reduce risk: Preventing diabetes or high blood sugar may not stop dementia from developing, but simple lifestyle changes can help avoid diabetes and cut the risk. They are:

- Follow your health care team's recommendations about the most appropriate plan for monitoring your blood glucose, cholesterol level and blood pressure.
- Eat healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and low-fat milk and cheese.
- If you're overweight, eat a healthy diet and exercise to lose weight. Obesity can lead to diabetes and other health problems.

- Don't smoke.
- Aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes every day.
- Examine your feet daily for sores.
- Take any prescribed medications on schedule.

By following these lifestyle changes, you may reduce your risk of dementia by 50%!

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out the website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.