

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 last 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.

Hearing Loss - Dementia is more common in people who developed hearing problems during mid-life (aged 40–65). This means that, if a person's hearing worsens in mid-life, their risk of developing dementia when they are older increases. There may be several reasons for this, including: People with hearing problems may be more likely to withdraw from social situations and become more isolated over time. This can reduce their cognitive reserve. The effort of straining to hear things may also make it harder for other mental processes to work properly. The diseases that cause dementia can also affect hearing.

Studies have shown that using a hearing aid may significantly reduce a person's risk of getting dementia. It's important that a person gets regular hearing tests as they get older. Alzheimers.org.uk

Down Syndrome – By middle age, most people with Down syndrome have the plaques and tangles of Alzheimer's disease. Healthline.com

HIV - HIV/AIDS affects many of the body's organ systems, including the brain and nervous system. Most people don't know that the HIV infection actually makes its way to the brain early in the disease process. HIV encephalopathy is an infection that spreads throughout the brain. It is one cause of dementia in people infected with HIV. The greater the spread of infection in the brain, the worse the dementia symptoms become. It is a serious consequence of HIV infection and is typically seen in advanced stages of the disease.

Treatment typically includes Antiretroviral therapy. This is aggressive medical treatment aimed at reducing the amount of AIDS virus in the body. It also can help ease dementia symptoms. Prescription medications your health care provider may recommend are antidepressants, antipsychotics, or stimulants. Deciding which one will be prescribed will depend on what may be causing your dementia. (hopkinsmedicine.org)

Multiple Sclerosis – According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (nationalmssociety.org), cognitive dysfunction is common in MS. For most people, the changes in cognitive function are mild and may involve one or two areas of cognitive functioning. For fewer people with MS the changes in cognitive function will be more challenging.

Rheumatoid arthritis - RA is a chronic disorder that affects millions of Americans. Dementia, on the other hand, is associated with diminishing cognitive capabilities that impair daily living. Both diseases are associated with older persons and genetic factors. Besides the inflammation associated with RA, there is reduced blood flow to vital body organs, which increases the risk of developing dementia. Additionally, medications used by RA patients increase the risk of developing dementia. However, biological therapies such as tumor necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors can lower the risk of dementia.

According to Rheumatology Advisor (rheumatologyadvisor.com), most but not all studies suggest that there is an increased risk of dementia in patients with RA. RA is associated with systemic inflammation, which has already been shown to be associated with increased cardiovascular disease. This has been well studied in RA and lupus. It has been shown that RA can increase the risk of myocardial infarction and stroke. It is felt that the systemic inflammation in RA can be associated with the microvascular disease in vascular dementia.

In addition, many patients with RA take glucocorticoids, and these can be associated with weight gain and elevated lipid levels, both of which can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. Patients with RA may be relatively inactive compared to patients without RA, and this can also increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Kidney disease - A study done in Sweden supports the case that changes in kidney function could be a warning sign of developing dementia. As for the reasons for the apparent link between CKD (Chronic Kidney Disease) and dementia, there could be a number of potential explanations, including that CKD and dementia both share traditional vascular risk factors, such as hypertension and diabetes. Also, that CKD can lead to chronic inflammation, oxidative stress, and other conditions that are associated with ischemic cerebrovascular lesions.

Though those and other causes would require more study to verify, the investigators said their analysis should prompt doctors and policy makers to consider strategies to detect dementia among patients with CKD. They said that could involve kidney function testing at dementia screening visits. Such a policy would also allow doctors to catch CKD early, an important factor given that awareness of CKD is still relatively low, they noted. American Journal of Managed Care (AJMC.com)

Depression - People who have had periods of depression in their life also have a higher risk of developing dementia. This may be because depression has harmful long-term effects on the brain and on the way a person thinks and copes with difficulties. Effectively managing depression with treatment is helpful to reduce this risk. There are many people who develop depression a few years before they get dementia. However, in these cases, it may be the development of dementia that is causing depression. (alzheimers.org.uk)

Studies suggest that antidepressant treatment may reduce the risk for Alzheimer's and related dementia. (nature.com)

This is the end of our articles on what medical conditions may contribute to Alzheimer's disease and other dementia. Taking care of yourself and treating your medical conditions are ways to lower your risk of dementia.

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 Nobsch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.