



A New Hope for Brain Health: Preventing and Living Well with Dementia

Summary based on: Livingston, G., Huntley, J., Liu, K. Y., Costafreda, S. G., Selbæk, G., Alladi, S., ... & Mukadam, N. (2024). Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the Lancet standing Commission. *The Lancet*, 404(0452), 572-62

Dementia is a growing global health concern, with **57 million people** affected in **2019** and projections reaching **153 million by 2050**, mainly due to people living longer. However, there is encouraging news: in high-income countries, the rate of dementia cases by age group has been decreasing over the past 20 years. This suggests that dementia is not an unavoidable part of aging and that prevention efforts can make a real difference

The 2024 report from the esteemed Lancet Commission on dementia provides "new hopeful evidence about dementia prevention, intervention, and care". This comprehensive document, developed by an international team of experts, synthesizes the most current scientific findings to offer clear, actionable pathways to reduce dementia risk and improve care for those living with the condition.

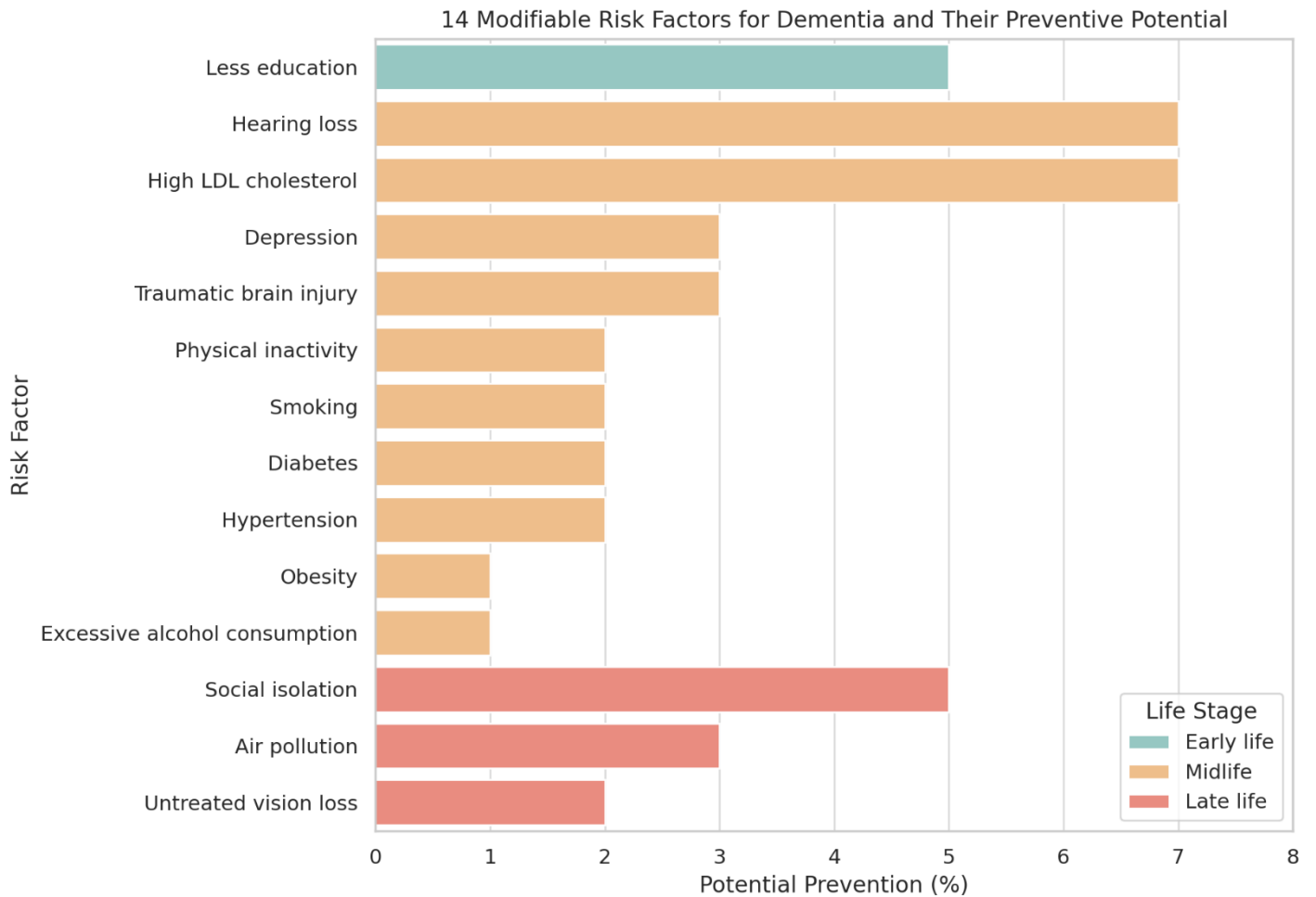
Empowering Your Brain Health: Key Insights

- **Up to 40–45% of dementia cases** could potentially be prevented by addressing **14 modifiable risk factors**.
- This offers a **hopeful shift in perspective**—dementia is not always inevitable.
- **Healthy changes** can reduce risk **at any age**, even in later life.
- Dementia risk is shaped by **lifestyle and environmental factors** that build up over time.
- **Brain health should be supported across the lifespan**, starting in childhood and continuing into old age.
- Prevention helps build "**cognitive reserve**", or the brain's ability to function despite damage or aging.
- A brain that is **mentally engaged, socially connected, and challenged regularly** becomes more resilient.
- This encourages people to adopt **lifelong learning, social involvement, and healthy habits** for better brain health.

Your Action Plan: Key Modifiable Risk Factors

The **14 risk factors** identified by the Lancet Commission can be changed or managed to reduce dementia risk.

- These risk factors span **early life, midlife, and late life**, emphasizing that brain health is shaped across the **entire life course**.
- Taking action—at **any age**—can make a **meaningful difference** in reducing dementia risk.



Education & Lifelong Learning: Building Brain Resilience

- Quality education and lifelong learning help protect against dementia.
- More years of schooling and mentally stimulating work or hobbies, especially in midlife, reduce risk.
- Benefits are linked to building cognitive reserve, which helps the brain cope with aging and disease.

Sensory Health: The Crucial Role of Hearing and Vision

- Treating hearing and vision loss significantly lowers dementia risk.
- Hearing aids are especially effective for people with other risk factors.
- Even small declines in hearing can raise risk.
- Vision loss is now a recognized risk factor; treatments like cataract surgery help reduce risk.
- Sensory loss can lead to isolation, depression, and reduced mental activity, which also increase dementia risk.

Heart & Vascular Health: Protecting Your Brain Through Your Body

- Keeping blood pressure at or below 130 mm Hg from age 40 protects brain health.
- High LDL cholesterol is now included as a risk factor—treatment is recommended.
- Obesity, diabetes, smoking, and excessive alcohol use in midlife raise dementia risk.
- Healthy changes like quitting smoking, exercising, or even cutting back on alcohol are protective.
- These risk factors often cluster, so improving one can help improve others, reducing brain blood vessel damage.

Protecting Your Head & Lungs: Preventing Injury and Pollution Exposure

- Traumatic brain injury (TBI) increases dementia risk at any age.
- Contact sports add to this risk—protective gear and rest after injury are important.
- Exposure to air pollution is also linked to higher dementia risk.
- Solutions involve both individual actions (e.g., wearing helmets) and public policy (e.g., clean air laws).

Mental Well-being & Social Connections: Nurturing Your Mind and Relationships

- Depression, loneliness, and lack of social contact all raise dementia risk.
- Mental and emotional health is just as important as physical health.
- Problems like sensory loss can lead to depression and isolation, compounding risk.
- Staying connected and emotionally supported helps preserve brain health.

Living Well with Dementia: Support and Advances in Care

- Early, accurate dementia diagnosis enables better planning, care, and emotional adjustment.
- Diagnosis should be based on individual need, not universal screening.
- Connecting to support services improves quality of life and care outcomes.

Treatments and Care: What's Available Now

Medications to Manage Symptoms

- **Cholinesterase inhibitors and memantine** are approved for Alzheimer's and Lewy body dementia.
- They offer **modest improvements** in thinking, daily activities, and quality of life.
- Generally considered **safe, low-cost**, and reduce unplanned hospital visits.
- **Do not stop disease progression**, but support symptom management.
- Access is limited in many low- and middle-income countries, highlighting global health disparities.

Newer Treatments: What's Emerging

- Drugs like **lecanemab** and **donanemab** slightly slow early Alzheimer's progression.
- They help by **reducing brain amyloid plaques**.
- **Challenges** include:
 - **High cost**
 - **Frequent IV infusions** and **ongoing monitoring** needed.
 - Risk of **serious side effects** (brain swelling, bleeding), especially in people with **APOE ε4** gene.
 - **Tested mostly in healthy, select groups**, so effects in the broader population remain uncertain.
- These advances are **promising but not widely accessible**, and raise concerns about **cost, equity, and real-world impact**.

Beyond Medication: The Power of Activities and Comprehensive Support for Individuals and Families

Essentials of Dementia Care

- Personalized care improves quality of life and reduces stress for both patients and caregivers.
- Activity programs help ease symptoms like agitation and depression.
- General exercise is healthy but doesn't directly treat behavioral symptoms.

Symptom Management

- Non-drug strategies are the first choice for behavioral symptoms.
- Antipsychotics should be used only when necessary and briefly.
- CBT can help manage depression.

Caregiver Support

- Support programs reduce caregiver stress and are cost-effective.
- Can be adapted across cultures and delivered by trained helpers.

Physical Health Matters

- Illness or hospital stays can worsen dementia.
- Good nutrition, hydration, and medication routines are vital.
- Delirium should be treated promptly.

The Role of Biomarkers: Guiding Diagnosis, Not Predicting Your Future

- **Biomarkers in blood or spinal fluid** can support diagnosis in people with memory issues.
- **Positive tests** (like amyloid plaques) do **not** mean someone will develop dementia.
- Many older adults have these brain changes **without symptoms**.
- **Clinical evaluation is essential**; relying only on test results can cause harm or misdiagnosis.

A Collective Effort: Public Health and Policy

- Dementia prevention goes **beyond personal lifestyle**.
- **Policies** that promote healthy environments are critical (e.g. clean air, safer neighborhoods, access to care).
- **Social and economic factors** like poverty and poor housing increase dementia risk.

Addressing Health Disparities: Ensuring Equity in Brain Health

- Risk factors are more common in **low- and middle-income countries** and marginalized communities.
- People in these groups often develop dementia **at younger ages**.
- Effective prevention includes:
 - **Access to quality education**
 - **Healthy living conditions**
 - **Supportive work environments**

Conclusion: Taking Steps Together for a Dementia-Free Future

Why Action on Dementia Matters Now

- **Dementia rates are rising globally**, making prevention more urgent.
- **Dementia is not inevitable with age**—many cases can be delayed or prevented.

What Individuals Can Do

- Stay **mentally and socially active**.
- Live a **healthy lifestyle**: eat well, exercise, and limit alcohol and smoking.
- **Protect hearing and vision** through regular check-ups and treatment.
- Manage **chronic conditions** like diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

The Role of Communities and Policy

- **Public health policies** and supportive environments are key for brain health.
- Access to **education, healthcare, and safe environments** should be equitable for all.

Beyond Medication

- New drugs offer **some benefit**, but their impact is **limited** and costly.
- The biggest improvements come from **person-centered care, emotional support, and caregiver assistance**.

A Call to Action

- We **don't need to wait** for more science—**action can be taken now**.
- Reducing dementia requires **shared responsibility** among individuals, families, and governments.

A New Hope for Brain Health

Insights from the Lancet Commission's 2024 Report on Dementia

The Global Challenge of Dementia

Dementia is a growing global health issue, with projections showing a significant increase in cases by 2050. However, new research reveals a powerful message of hope: dementia is not an inevitable part of aging, and prevention is possible.

57M

People living with dementia worldwide in 2019

153M

Projected number of people with dementia by 2050

45%

of dementias could be prevented by addressing 14 risk factors

A Life-Course Approach to Prevention

It is never too early or too late to take action. The report emphasizes that different risk factors are more prominent at different stages of life, highlighting the need for lifelong vigilance and tailored interventions.

Early Life

Less Education

Ensuring access to quality childhood education builds cognitive reserve, providing a strong foundation for lifelong brain health.

Midlife (Age 45-65)

Hearing Loss, TBI, Hypertension, Alcohol, Obesity, Smoking, Depression, Diabetes, Physical Inactivity, High LDL Cholesterol

This is a critical period to manage vascular and metabolic health and protect the brain from injury and sensory deprivation.

Late Life (Age >65)

Social Isolation, Air Pollution, Untreated Vision Loss

Maintaining social connections, ensuring clean air, and addressing sensory impairments are key to protecting cognitive function in later years.

Living Well with Dementia: Advances in Care

Current & Future Treatments

While there is no cure, treatments can manage symptoms and, in some cases, slow cognitive decline. A timely diagnosis is key to accessing these options.

Symptomatic Medications

Established drugs like cholinesterase inhibitors can improve quality of life by managing cognitive symptoms.

New Antibody Treatments

Drugs like lecanemab show modest success in slowing decline in early Alzheimer's, but come with high costs and significant side effects.

The Power of Non-Pharmacological Support

Comprehensive support for both the individual and their family is the cornerstone of high-quality dementia care.

Personalized Activities

Tailored activity programs can improve quality of life and reduce challenging symptoms like agitation.

Caregiver Support

Interventions for family caregivers are highly effective in reducing stress and depression, and are considered cost-effective.

A Call to Action for a Healthier Future

The evidence is clear: we can take meaningful steps to reduce the risk of dementia. This requires a collective effort from individuals, communities, and policymakers to create supportive environments for brain health for everyone. Action should not wait.

This summary and infographic are part of ClarityPath's commitment to supporting caregivers with compassionate, evidence-informed resources.

Visit <https://claritypath.ca/> for more tools and guides.