

Alzheimer's Risk Factors

Are You at Risk of Alzheimer's?

Alzheimer's disease begins to damage the brain years before symptoms appear. Why pathological changes occur in the brain leading to such profound damage is not clear. Risk factors are things that increase your chances of developing Alzheimer's disease. Some are preventable, such as exercise, some not, for example genetic factors and age. Lets look at some risk factors for Alzheimer's disease.

Age and Alzheimer's disease

Age is the biggest risk factor for Alzheimer's.

At 65 to 70 years your risk is about 1.5%

At 70 to 74 years your risk is about 3.5%

At 75 to 79 years your risk is about 6.8%

Your risk of Alzheimer's nearly doubles every 5 years so by the age of 95 nearly one half will have Alzheimer's disease.

Genetic risk factor and Alzheimer's

Genetic risk factors as a cause of Alzheimer's disease is an area of intense investigation.

- Having a parent or sibling with Alzheimer's increases your risk by two to three and a half times. The more individuals in a family with Alzheimer's, the greater the risk of developing the disease.
- There are a very small number of people world-wide who have a defective gene on chromosome 14 or 21 that seems to trigger Alzheimer's disease with early onset, often between the ages of 35 and 60 years.
- It is known that a protein called Apolipoprotein E, of which we all have a copy of one of three types, affects our chances of getting Alzheimer's disease. If you have two copies of the E4 version you have an increased risk of Alzheimer's, the E2 version seems to give protection against it.

People with Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21) develop the pathological changes but not always the clinical symptoms of Alzheimer's.

It is believed that in most cases genetic factors merely increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Cardiovascular risk factors for Alzheimer's

Vascular means vessels that carry or circulate fluids, such as blood. *Cardio* is the heart. It is known that cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke increases your risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. The good news is that you can do something to help prevent vascular problems such as giving up smoking, a healthy diet, lowering your cholesterol and by regular exercise.

Diet and Alzheimer's risk factor

The evidence on the effects of diet and Alzheimer risk are somewhat confusing. Research on antioxidants such as vitamin E and vitamin C have conflicting results, as has Omega-3 fatty acids, found mostly in cold water fish. A healthy balanced diet is linked to a healthy heart and reduced vascular disease, all of which help prevent Alzheimer's disease.

Lifestyle risk factors and Alzheimer's

Smoking: There is conflicting research but there are indications that nicotine is a protector against Alzheimer's disease! However, smoking is also known to cause cardiovascular and respiratory diseases that are Alzheimer's risk factors.

Lack of exercise:An increasing amount of research indicate that moderate regular exercise helps to prevent Alzheimer's.

Alcohol:Low alcohol intake can be beneficial to your health. However high alcohol intake is known to increase your risk of dementia significantly.

Intelligence, education risk factor for Alzheimer's disease

A higher standard of education has been identified as offering some protection against Alzheimer's disease. Smaller brains and head size leading to fewer connections within the brain have also been suggested in causation of Alzheimer's disease. It is likely that poor education may mask other factors such as poverty which may well help the development of Alzheimer's disease.

Head injury and Alzheimer's risk factor

Where amyloid is deposited in the brain immediately after a head injury a positive link to dementia has been found. As has head trauma following vascular damage from such diseases as stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus and atherosclerotic disease.

Stress as Alzheimer's risk factor

Only one study has linked stress to Alzheimer's disease. It is thought that stress hormones (glucocorticoid hormones) may cause damage in the brain that then can contribute to the development of Alzheimer's disease.

Hormones and Alzheimer's risk factor

Women have an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease even once their longer life is factored out. Estrogen loss following menopause may be the reason.

The findings on testosterone decline in older age require more research before a link is positively demonstrated.

Environment risk factor and Alzheimer's

Attempts have been made to associate environmental causes, such as high levels of aluminum with Alzheimer's. This theory is now less popular as more research is carried out.

Source and Courtesy :http://alzheimers.about.com/od/diagnosisissues/a/alz_risk_factor.htm