

Reducing your risk of Dementia



Who we are

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 and promote their rights and interests.

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people enjoy better later lives.

We have three strategic aims:



We help older people to be as well as they can be



We promote a positive view of ageing and later life



We tackle loneliness and isolation

How we can help

We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

Our **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.



Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222
(Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm)



Visit [agescotland.org.uk](https://www.agescotland.org.uk)
to find out more.

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Reducing your risk of dementia

Currently, there is no cure for dementia, and it cannot be entirely prevented. Some things that increase your risk of dementia, like age or genetics, can't be changed, but we have some control over others.

Some research suggests that 40% of dementia cases could be delayed or prevented by changes to our health and lifestyle. Many of the risk factors for dementia are also risk factors for other medical conditions such as heart disease and stroke. Others are more specific to dementia.

This guide explains some of these risk factors along with steps you can take to lower your risk of developing dementia.



70%

higher risk of developing dementia

What is dementia?

Dementia is a **set of symptoms** caused by damage to the brain from certain diseases or conditions. Once a person develops dementia, it gets progressively worse.

Symptoms can include problems with memory loss, thinking, mental agility, language and understanding.

There are many different types of dementia although some are more common than others. The most common types of dementia are:

- **Dementia caused by Alzheimer's disease:** the most common type of dementia, accounting for around two thirds of cases. In Alzheimer's disease, two specific proteins build up in brain cells and these cells become damaged, causing dementia.
- **Vascular dementia:** the second most common type of dementia. It occurs when the blood supply to the brain is impaired, causing damage to brain cells.
- **Dementia with Lewy bodies:** accounts for around 10% of cases of dementia. Lewy bodies are tiny deposits of protein that can build up in the cells of the brain and are associated with damage and loss of function.
- **Frontotemporal dementia:** a less common type of dementia. It is caused by damage in the frontal and/or temporal lobes of the brain associated with a build-up of certain proteins.
- **Mixed dementia:** when someone has more than one type of dementia. It is common to have both Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia together.



Would you like to learn more?

Age Scotland runs free workshops covering topics such as understanding dementia, prevention and living well with dementia.

Visit www.age.scot/dementia or call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** for more information and to sign up.



Smoking

Smoking increases the risk of heart disease and stroke because of the damage it can cause to the heart and blood vessels. This same damage can stop oxygen reaching the brain and cause brain cells to die. Chemicals in cigarettes can also cause damage to brain cells. Both of these effects can contribute to dementia.

Research suggests that after several years of not smoking, former smokers can reduce their risk of developing dementia to close to that of people who never smoked.

People who smoke have a much better chance of stopping if they have support. If you would like support to stop smoking you could:

- ask your GP for advice
- talk to your pharmacist
- contact **Quit Your Way** for free personalised information and advice about how to stop smoking. Call **0800 84 84 84** or search **Quit Your Way** at **www.nhsinform.scot**.

Alcohol

In general, it is fine to have an occasional drink. However, people who drink heavily or binge drink are more likely to develop dementia than those who drink moderately. Heavy drinking is associated with a higher risk of Alzheimer's disease, and over a long period it can specifically cause alcohol-related dementia.

The Chief Medical Officer's guidelines state that, to keep risks from alcohol low, working age adults should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week, spread over 3 or more days. It is also recommended to have at least 2 or 3 alcohol-free days per week.

UNITS

A standard glass (175mL) of (12%) wine = 2.1 units

A pint of lower-strength (3.6%) beer or cider = 2 units

A pint of higher-strength (5.2%) beer or cider = 3 units

A single shot (25mL) of spirit e.g. whisky, gin or vodka (40%) = 1 unit

As we get older, the body is less able to process alcohol, and some advice suggests guideline amounts for older adults should be lower.

If you want to drink less and would like help cutting down, speak to your GP or a specialist service such as:

i With You: provides free, confidential support with alcohol or drugs via a local service or online. Webchat is available at www.wearewithyou.org.uk/help-and-advice or call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** for help finding a local service.

Alcoholics Anonymous: provides free self-help groups across Scotland. Its 12-step programme involves getting sober with the help of regular support groups. Call **0800 917 7650**. Webchat is available at www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk.

Being active

A fifth of Alzheimer's disease cases worldwide are estimated to be due to lack of physical activity. Being active lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer, heart disease and strokes. And what is good for your heart and circulation is also good for the brain.

Keeping active is also good for your mental health, and may improve thinking and memory. This can in turn lower the risk of developing dementia.

Taking part in physical activity is also a great way to get out and about and to meet new people. Time spent with other people can reduce loneliness and isolation, which may be risk factors for memory and thinking problems.



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risk of type 2 diabetes,
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.....





If you want to be more active, finding an activity you enjoy means you will be more likely to stick to it. If you would like help finding activity groups in your area, contact the **Age Scotland Community Connecting Service** on **0800 12 44 222**. A volunteer will get in touch to talk to you about your interests and give you details about what's going on where you live.

You do not have to join a group to become more active. Simple changes to your routine can make a big difference. You could:

- walk up the stairs instead of using lifts or escalators
- get off the bus a couple of stops early
- when walking, choose a route that is longer or more hilly
- park further away from shops and walk the extra distance
- stay standing up whilst talking on the phone.

NHS guidelines recommend that adults aged 65 or over should do at least some light physical activity every day. The recommendation per week is at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity for people who are already active, or a combination of both.



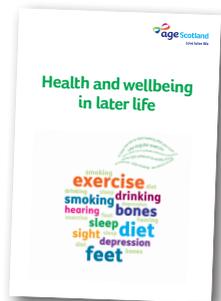
Moderate physical activity should make you feel warmer and get your heart beating faster, but you should still be able to talk. Brisk walking is a great activity for people of all ages and fitness levels. It is simple, free and you don't need any special equipment.

Vigorous physical activity should make you breathe hard and fast and raise your heart rate significantly. Vigorous activity can include jogging, running, fast swimming, football, tennis and aerobics.

Strength and balance are important too. You should try and do activities that strengthen your muscles at least twice a week. Examples include carrying heavy shopping bags, lifting weights and digging the garden.

Don't sit still - however active you are, you should break up long periods of sitting still by either standing up or moving about. Even gentle activity such as walking slowly, doing some dusting around the house, or some light gardening can improve your overall health.

If you have limited mobility and are at risk of falls you may benefit from activities that improve balance, co-ordination and mobility. Examples include yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi and seated exercises such as marching, arm and leg stretches, and twists. You should also aim to stand up from sitting at least once every hour. If you use a wheelchair, some light seated exercises are a great way to break up long periods of sitting still.



For more information about staying active see our guide to **Health and wellbeing in later life**.



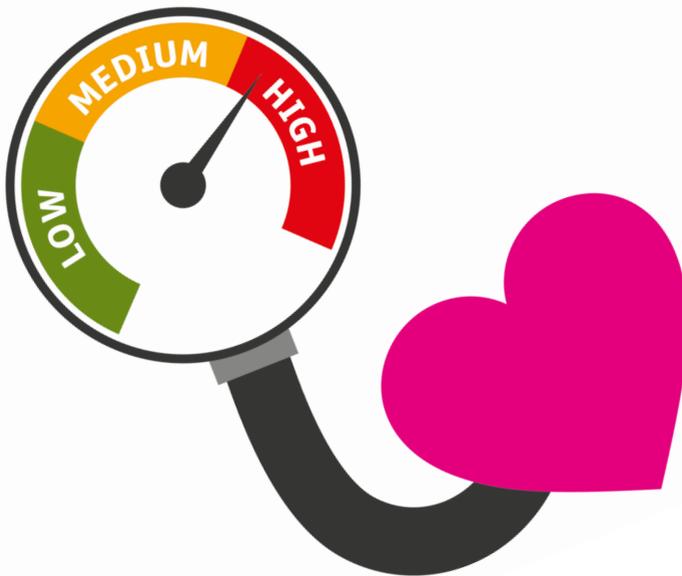
Blood pressure

High blood pressure in mid-life can increase your risk of developing dementia, particularly vascular dementia. Anyone aged 40 or over should have their blood pressure checked regularly by their GP. A healthy blood pressure should be around 120/80mmHg.

Exercising, eating healthily, maintaining a healthy weight, not drinking too much and not smoking all help to maintain a healthy blood pressure.

If you do have high blood pressure, your doctor may advise you to make changes to your diet or exercise, or prescribe medicine.

i **Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland** have advice line nurses you can speak to about blood pressure. Call **0808 801 0899** or see their website **www.chss.org.uk**.



Diet and weight

Adopting a healthy diet can help to keep cholesterol, blood pressure and weight down, and help prevent the development of type 2 diabetes. These are all separate risk factors for dementia.

People who eat a Mediterranean diet may have a lower risk of developing memory and thinking problems. A Mediterranean diet includes plenty of fruit and vegetables and starchy foods like bread and pasta, along with some fish and less meat.

In general, it is better to limit foods high in saturated fat, such as processed meats, butter and cakes. Instead, eat foods containing unsaturated fats, such as oily fish, nuts and seeds.

Eating too many foods high in salt and sugar can increase the risk of many illnesses and problems, including heart disease, weight gain, tooth decay and strokes. Try to eat these foods only occasionally and in small amounts. Be aware that some processed savoury foods, such as ready meals and cooking sauces, are often high in added sugar.

The Eat Well plate shows how your diet should balance out:



Being either underweight or overweight may be risk factors for dementia. Speak to your GP if you are concerned about your weight to see if changes to your diet or exercise could help you reach the right weight for you.

Research suggests that the best way to lose weight is to make long-term changes to diet and exercise levels that result in a steady rate of weight loss.

If you need to gain weight, speak to your GP about the best way to do this.



As you get older your appetite can change and it can become harder to maintain a healthy diet. For advice about eating healthily see Age Scotland's **Eat Well** guide or talk to your GP.

Being overweight, and underweight, are risk factors



Sleeping well

Sleep restores your body, mind and memory and can help to protect you against some health problems, including dementia. Adults need seven to nine hours of sleep each night, but in later life you may wake up more at night or become tired earlier than you used to. To help you get a good night's sleep:

Morning routine

- wake at the same time every day
- be in daylight, outdoors, or at an open window

Throughout the day

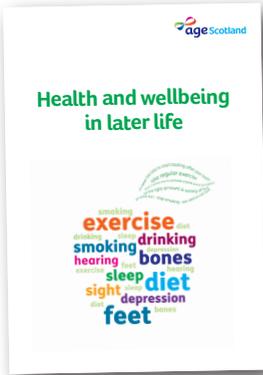
- enjoy your coffee before lunch
- be physically active
- don't nap for more than 30 minutes a day
- drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated

Approaching bedtime

- try to go to bed at the same time every day
- don't nap
- do only gentle physical activity
- avoid heavy meals, alcohol, caffeine and fizzy drinks
- avoid screens and bright light
- note down anything you need to remember tomorrow
- make sure your bedroom is cool, dark and quiet and your bed is comfortable



Some health problems and medicines can affect sleep. Speak to your GP if falling and staying asleep is a problem for you.



The Age Scotland guide **Health and wellbeing in Later Life** provides more information about sleep. You can order a copy by calling the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.

**Sleep restores
your body, mind
and memory**



Social connection

Studies have shown that high levels of loneliness and a lack of social connection can increase the risk of dementia by around 50%. This is similar to the level of risk caused by lack of physical activity and having type 2 diabetes.

Experts are not certain why this is, but keeping your brain stimulated is known to be good for brain health. It may be that social contact strengthens connections in the brain. Picking up new skills and hobbies can also be a good way to keep your brain sharp.

i If you would like help finding social groups and activities in your area, contact the **Age Scotland Community Connecting Service** on **0800 12 44 222**. A volunteer will get in touch to talk to you about your interests and give you details about what's going on where you live. If needed, they can also tell you about community transport options.



Hearing aids

Untreated hearing loss is a risk factor for dementia. The reasons for this are not fully understood. However, it is thought that changes contributing to dementia might happen in the brain when it can no longer hear speech properly. There may also be a connection between difficulty communicating and increased social isolation, which is also a risk factor for dementia.

Many people leave hearing loss untreated. However, research has shown that wearing hearing aids could reduce dementia risk by almost 50%.

Hearing aids are available for free through the NHS. Your GP can refer you to have a hearing test if you are having trouble hearing.



Useful contacts

Age Scotland helpline 0800 12 44 222

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call **0800 12 44 222** and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

Age Scotland produces a range of information guides about rights and issues in later life. You can call us on **0800 12 44 222** for a copy of our publications list or download copies of our publications from our website at **www.agescotland.org.uk**.

Alzheimer Scotland

Alzheimer Scotland is the leading dementia organisation in Scotland. It campaigns for the rights of people with dementia and their families and provides an extensive range of innovative and personalised support services.

Freephone 24-hour Dementia Helpline: **0808 808 3000**

Email: **info@alzscot.org**

www.alzscot.org

NHS Inform

NHS Inform provides information about illnesses and conditions, symptoms, tests and treatments, health rights and where to get help.

Tel: **0800 22 44 88** / **www.nhsinform.scot**



Would you like to learn more?

Age Scotland runs free workshops covering topics such as understanding dementia, prevention and living well with dementia.

Visit www.age.scot/dementia or call the Age Scotland helpline on 0800 12 44 222 for more information and to sign up.

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Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Scotland or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

How you can help

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information we provide is free and impartial. It helps older people access their rights and entitlements and can be life changing.

We are also a lifeline for older people who are feeling lonely and isolated. You can help us to support older people who need us most.

Together, we can make a difference.



Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- Call **03330 15 14 60**
- Visit **age.scot/donate**
- Text **AGESCOTGIVE** to **70085** to donate £5*
- Complete the **donation form** and return by Freepost



Fundraise

Whether it's having a bake sale or running a marathon, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help us to continue being there for older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

*Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

Please donate today



Complete the form and return to RSBS-KEHC-GBBC, Age Scotland, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR

Your details

Title:	Forename:	Surname:
Address:		
	City:	
Postcode:	Date of birth:	

By providing us with your telephone number and email address you are consenting to us contacting you via phone, text and email.

Email:	
Home tel:	Mobile tel:

I WOULD LIKE TO DONATE

£75 £50 £25 Other (£)

I wish to pay by (please tick):

MasterCard Visa CAF

CharityCard Cheque (payable to Age Scotland)

Signature

Name on Card

Card No.

Expiry date Security code

Date

I prefer not to receive a thank you acknowledgement for this donation

I would like information about leaving a gift in my Will

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE MY DONATION WORTH 25% MORE

I want Age Scotland** and its partner charities to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations.

giftaid it

I am a UK tax payer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Yes, I want Age Scotland** to claim Gift Aid on my donations

I do not wish you to claim Gift Aid on my donations

Date

Keeping in touch

We will stay in contact by post unless you ask us not to. We will never sell your data and we promise to keep your details safe and secure. You can change your mind at any time by emailing us on contact@agescotland.org.uk or calling us on 0333 323 2400.

You can read Age Scotland's privacy policy at [age.scot/privacypolicy](https://www.agescot.org.uk/agescot/privacypolicy).

**Age Scotland, part of the Age Network, is an independent charity dedicated to improving the later lives of everyone on the ageing journey, within a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland.
Registration Number: 153343. Charity Number: SC010100. Registered Office: Causewayside House, 160 Causewayside, Edinburgh EH9 1PR.

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

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Let's keep in touch

Contact us:

Head office

0333 323 2400

Age Scotland helpline

0800 12 44 222

Email

info@agescotland.org.uk

Visit our website

www.agescotland.org.uk



Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today at [agescot/roundup](https://www.agescotland.org.uk/agescot/roundup)



Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



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