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Thinking About Your Risk for Alzheimer's Disease? Five Questions To Consider

Ask yourself the five questions below to help understand your risk factors for developing [Alzheimer's disease](#).

How old are you?

Age is the biggest known risk factor for Alzheimer's. Most people with Alzheimer's develop the disease when they are 65 or older, with less than 10% of cases occurring before then. As a person ages past 65, their risk of Alzheimer's increases. About one in 13 people age 65 to 84 and one in three people 85 and older are living with Alzheimer's.

Does Alzheimer's run in your family?

Family history is also an important risk factor. People with a parent or sibling diagnosed with Alzheimer's have a higher risk of developing the disease than those who don't have family members with the disease. Families can have many things in common, including their genes, environment, and lifestyle, that all may play a role. For example, lifestyle habits such as diet and exercise, which can be influenced by family, can affect overall health and increase risk for Alzheimer's. Importantly, not everyone with a history of Alzheimer's in their family will develop the disease and vice versa — not everyone who develops Alzheimer's has a family history of the disease.

What's your lifestyle?

There are some risk factors, like age, that you cannot change. However, there may be ways to promote better brain health and reduce your risk of Alzheimer's by addressing certain lifestyle factors, including:

- Unmanaged chronic health issues, such as high blood pressure or hearing loss
- Physical inactivity
- Unhealthy diet
- Alcohol misuse
- Smoking
- Not getting enough sleep or not sleeping well



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- Social isolation
- Lack of mental stimulation

Researchers cannot yet say for certain whether making positive changes in these areas can prevent dementia, but doing so is beneficial to living a healthier lifestyle overall. Learn more about [leading a healthy lifestyle that may help address risk factors associated with Alzheimer's and related dementias](#).

What medical conditions do you have?

Having certain medical conditions may increase your risk of developing Alzheimer's. For example, cardiovascular disease, which includes conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and coronary artery disease, affects the heart and blood vessels and has been linked to Alzheimer's.

Several risk factors associated with developing cardiovascular disease are also associated with Alzheimer's. For example, studies have shown that managing **high blood pressure** reduces the risk of mild cognitive impairment and the risk of dementia. Specifically, [one large clinical trial](#) showed that lowering systolic blood pressure to below 120 mmHg reduced the risk of mild cognitive impairment, and a [review of observational studies](#) showed that managing high blood pressure with medication reduced the risk of dementia compared to people with high blood pressure who didn't take medication. Learn more about [blood pressure and Alzheimer's](#) and [ways to control your blood pressure](#).

Other risk factors associated with both cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's include **diabetes**, **overweight or obesity**, and **high LDL ("bad") cholesterol**.

In addition, other medical conditions associated with a higher risk of Alzheimer's include:

- [Hearing loss](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Mild cognitive impairment](#)
- Concussion or other [traumatic brain injury](#)

Getting recommended health screenings and regularly checking in with a health care provider can help you learn about and manage medical conditions. Treat high blood pressure with healthy lifestyle changes and medications if prescribed by your doctor. Protect your ears from loud sounds and use hearing restorative devices, such as hearing aids, if needed. Make healthy food choices and get regular exercise to maintain a healthy weight.

What about biomarkers?

Biomarkers are characteristics we can measure that help show what's happening inside the body. Scientists have identified several biomarkers associated with Alzheimer's. While testing for biomarkers can provide some information about a person's risk, these tests can't tell for sure whether or not someone will develop the disease. Right now, many of these biomarkers are used mostly in research settings or to help doctors in diagnosing the disease.

Genetic variants are a type of biomarker that have been associated with Alzheimer's risk. Variants in the apolipoprotein E (*APOE*) gene are one example. A variant called *APOE ε4* has been associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's in certain populations, while a variant called *APOE ε2* may offer some protection against Alzheimer's in others.

At-home tests are available for a fee to test for *APOE* variants. People considering such tests will benefit from talking with a doctor or genetic counselor to better understand the test and what their results may mean. Learn more about [Alzheimer's and genetics](#).

Other biomarkers for Alzheimer's include levels of the proteins beta-amyloid and tau. Doctors may use brain scans and cerebrospinal fluid tests that measure these protein levels to help determine whether a person's cognitive difficulties are caused by Alzheimer's or not. Blood tests are also now available that can measure levels of beta-amyloid. However, none of these tests are commonly used to indicate someone's risk outside of a research setting.

Identifying who may or may not develop Alzheimer's is complex. Researchers continue to investigate biomarkers and other risk factors for the disease. Learn more about [biomarkers that help diagnose Alzheimer's or a related dementia](#).

The bottom line

Scientists are still learning about what causes Alzheimer's and what puts some people at higher risk than others. While we know some of the factors that influence a person's risk, there are probably many other factors that have not yet been identified. Talk with a doctor if you have concerns or questions about your risk of developing the disease. The doctor may suggest [changes in memory and thinking](#) to watch out for. They may also recommend steps for staying healthy overall to help maintain [cognitive health](#) and [reduce the risk of dementia](#).

You may also be interested in

- Learning about [research advances in Alzheimer's prevention](#)
- Viewing an infographic of [healthy lifestyle choices that may reduce your risk of dementia](#)
- Watching a video on [biomarkers and how they can help diagnose dementia](#)

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Explore the Alzheimers.gov website for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.

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