Dementia news: Regular blood pressure and weight checks help GPs diagnose disease earlier

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DEMENTIA affects more women than men but females receive worse medical treatment - new research has revealed. Experts have said isolated elderly women are less likely to go to the doctor for blood pressure and weight loss checks.

Medical research has revealed women make fewer visits to GPs, get less health monitoring and take more potentially harmful drugs than men.

Researchers at University College London examined the medical records of 68,000 dementia patients and 259,000 people without dementia using The Health Improvement Network(THIN) database.

Despite being more vulnerable to physical and mental illness the study showed [patients with dementia](http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/732023/dementia-alzheimer-s-disease-leading-cause-death-heart-disease) received less medical care that those without.

Psychiatrist Dr Claudia Cooper, who led the research, said: “Women are more likely to get Alzheimer's-related dementia than men.

“They also live longer and so are more likely to be without the friends and family who would normally spot the signs of dementia, and encourage the women to seek medical help.

“We found that women were more likely to be on [psychotropic drugs](http://www.express.co.uk/expressadmin/posts/add/0/%20http:/www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/715402/Dementia-patients-treatment-antipsychotics-drugs) - sedatives or anti-psychotics - which can be harmful in the long term and may not be appropriate.”

She said women tend to stay on the drugs for longer- which could be because they have fewer check-ups to see if the drugs were still needed.

Dr Cooper added: “Because women tend to live longer than men, they are more likely to live alone without a family carer to help them access healthcare.

“Perhaps because of this, they are more at risk of missing out on medical help that might help them stay well for longer. ”

Dr Cooper said GPs should be more alert to the risks faced by isolated elderly women and find ways to help people who have no one to look out for them.

“If GPs encouraged elderly women to come in for regular blood pressure and weight checks, dementia could be spotted earlier.

“Weight loss is a really common sign because people who have dementia often forget to eat.“

Dr Cooper added: “Dementia can cause a wide range of physical complications, including difficulties swallowing and mobility problems.

“People with dementia are particularly susceptible to malnutrition, as they may have difficulties eating, preparing food or remembering to eat.

“Previous research has shown that up to 45 per cent of dementia patients experience clinically significant weight loss, which can lead to further physical problems and frailty.

“However, despite this high risk, less than half of dementia patients are currently receiving an annual weight check-up.

Signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's

Changes in mood and personality - If you notice a loved one become easily upset, confused, depressed or anxious they could be suffering from Alzheimer's so talk to them and book an appointment with the doctor

“The good news is that things seem to be improving: only 24 per cent of patients had their weight monitored in 2002 compared with 43 per cent in 2013.”

George McNamara, head of policy at Alzheimer's Society, said: “This research adds to the many concerns surrounding a condition which is already the most feared among people over 55.

“In addition to facing an illness without a known cure, people with dementia should not be expected to face inequalities in accessing the few health services that are available.

“Everyone with dementia should have an annual review, but this research raises some grave concerns that women, who are disproportionately affected by the condition, aren't getting the support they need.”

He said it was particularly worrying that medication is not reviewed regularly enough, adding that this could lead to the prolonged and ‘unnecessary’ use of antipsycotics.

“What is clear is that people with dementia need support to help them access the various health and care services they are entitled to,” he said.

“For many people this will be in the form of a family carer, however many are left by Government to rely on charities or threadbare social care services.

“We need to see an end to the increasingly impossible environment in which these services operate as a matter of urgency.”

The study was published in Age and Ageing.