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GP **test** to predict your **dementia** risk;   
**Lifestyle** check can help fight disease  
  
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MILLIONS of people could be spared the horrors of **dementia** thanks to a new **test** that assesses the risk of developing it.

Information on patient **lifestyle** gathered by GPs can help predict the chances of being struck down by the devastating condition that affects more than 35,000 people in Ireland. Those more likely to develop it could change their habits to reduce the risks.

The **Dementia** Risk Score is a composite of factors contained within medical records - history of depression, stroke, alcohol intake, diabetes, irregular heart rate, weight loss, smoking and high blood pressure.

They are fed into a database that reveals how high or low the chances of developing the condition are.

Created by scientists at University College London, it is able to predict people aged 60 to 79 who are at very low risk of developing **dementia** over the next five years with 85% accuracy.

Lead researcher Kate Walters said: "This could help GPs working with people anxious about developing**dementia**. There are, of course, ethical considerations. Some people are keen to know as much as possible about their risk and may decide to make **lifestyle** changes which could lower it. Other people will simply not want to know."

routine The **test** was not as good at predicting the risk for those aged over 80.

There is no cure for **dementia** and it is extremely difficult for doctors to predict in advance who will suffer.

But the new **test** could, in theory, give every patient a percentage risk of them being officially diagnosed with the disease within five years.

Those with a high chance may be offered further more detailed examinations, such as a memory**test.**

Researchers used anonymised data from almost a million **patient records** to calculate the likelihood of developing **dementia** within five years.

The **Alzheimer's** Society said more research would need to be done before the **test** becomes routine.

Research director Dr Doug Brown warned there was a "level of uncertainty" surrounding the DRS. He added: "This reduces the likelihood that the score will be used widely by doctors."

Dr Matthew Norton of **Alzheimer's** Research warned the **test** was "not 100% accurate". He said: "It needs further investigation."

Details of the **tests** will be published in journal BMC Medicine today.

It comes as researchers in New York claimed driving in older age could help protect against**Alzheimer's** by keeping the mind alert.

A blood **test** is being developed that can rapidly tell if patients have a viral or bacterial lung infection - reducing unnecessary use of antibiotics.

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**GRAPHIC:** BLOOD PRESSURE Rise in levels can be indicator of **dementia** riskBOOZE Alcohol intake is one aspect docs will checkMEDICAL CONDITIONS Stroke, depression and diabetes are among the signsBODY MASS INDEX Being overweight could have affect on future healthPRESCRIPTION PILLS Number of drugs given for **Alzheimer's** has soared  
  
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