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Data could predict risk of **dementia**  
  
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Doctors can predict your risk of developing **dementia** by piecing together hidden clues contained in your medical records, researchers have said.

Information gathered during visits to the GP - such as alcohol consumption, whether someone is underweight or if they have a history of depression - can pinpoint which patients are likely to develop conditions such as **Alzheimer's** disease in the next five years.

A new screening **test** for people aged 60 to 79 developed at University College London could be used to reassure patients concerned they might be developing **dementia**, researchers said.

The computer **algorithm** was developed and tested using the **patient records** of almost one million individuals with no record of **dementia**, cognitive impairment or memory problems. Kate Walters, a lead researcher, said: "I am a GP and it is common to see people worried about developing **dementia**, so for some people it could be very reassuring ... if you are told you are at low risk, it is almost always right."

The **test** was slightly less accurate at identifying patients who were high-risk. She said: "If you are told you are at high risk, most of the time you won't go on to get **dementia** ... because **dementia** is relatively rare in that age group."

The researchers said that the tool "may be most helpful in 'ruling out' those at very low risk from further testing or intensive preventative activities". The **test** was not accurate enough to be used in groups of patients aged between 80 and 95, the researchers found. The researchers said a key advantage of the model was that it relied only on factors routinely recorded by GPs.

The anonymous records used to develop the **dementia** risk score tool came from 377 UK general practices and were recorded between 1995 and 2011 in the **health** improvement network database.

Government plans to make such data more available to researchers, under a scheme known as care.data, have stalled over patient privacy concerns.