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**BLOOD PRESSURE PILLS 'HALVE' RISK OF** **ALZHEIMER'S**  
  
**BYLINE:** BY JENNY HOPE MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT  
  
**LENGTH:** 406 words

TAKING newer blood pressure drugs cuts the risk of Alzheimer's by up to 50 per cent, British scientists say.

These patients are also less likely to develop vascular dementia Z a condition caused by problems in blood supply to the brain Z than people on older medication.

The first study of its kind opens the door for a treatment that might delay, slow or even prevent dementia.

People with high blood pressure are more at risk of developing Alzheimer's and similar diseases, but some are protected by the drugs they take, the study shows.

Bristol University researchers investigated medication which targets a biochemical pathway called the renin angiotensin system, thought to affect the onset of Alzheimer's.

These drugs Z known as ARBs and ACE inhibitors Z have become increasingly prescribed in the last ten years.

They include ramipril, captopril, losartan, candesartan and valsartan.

Scientists analysed data from 40,000 patients aged over 60 who were being treated for hypertension, or high blood pressure.

One quarter had a type of dementia.

The biggest benefit was for patients taking ARBs, with a 53 per cent drop in risk, compared with patients on ACE inhibitors, who had a 24 per cent lower risk of Alzheimer's or similar condition.

This was compared with those taking blood pressure drugs such as beta blockers, calcium channel blockers and diuretics Z which have been around longer.

Alzheimer's patients were half as likely to be given ARBs, according to findings published online in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.

Study co-author Dr Patrick Kehoe, a pharmacologist at the Alzheimer's Research UK network in Bristol, said it was not possible to determine the minimum period of time needed to benefit from the drugs.

He explained that they block the effects of a hormone called angiotensin II, which results in the destruction of amyloid plaques in the brain that are the hallmark of Alzheimer's.

The next step is clinical trials to see if the drugs prevent mild cognitive impairment from progressing to full-blown dementia, or delay progression in patients with newly diagnosed Alzheimer's.

Blood pressure guidelines recommend patients under 55 have ARBs and ACE inhibitors, while older drugs are meant to be more effective in older patients.

Professor Peter Sever, an expert on hypertension at Imperial College London, said the study had 'very robust findings'.

More than 820,000 people in the UK have dementia.

telegraph.co.uk

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**Blood pressure drugs could halve risk of Alzheimer's;   
Drugs commonly used to control high blood pressure could halve the risk of Alzheimer's and substantially reduce the chance of developing another common form of dementia, British research suggests.**  
**BYLINE:** By Stephen Adams Medical Correspondent  
  
**LENGTH:** 470 words

Campaigners searching for ways to tackle dementia, which affects more than 800,000 people in Britain, have hailed the findings by academics at Bristol University as "an important step forward".

The study of almost 60,000 people in Britain over 60, found those taking a particular type of blood pressure lowering drug were 50 per cent less likely to develop Alzheimer's, than those on other types of anti-hypertensive medication.

They were also 25 per cent less likely to develop vascular dementia, the second most common form of the brain-wasting disease.

The drugs which appear to have the most protective effect are called angiotensin II receptor blockers, or ARBs.

They are commonly prescribed to under 55s to tackle high blood pressure.

Millions are thought to take them already.

These affect the renin angiotensin system, which helps regulate blood pressure and fluid balance.

Another type of drug to affect this system, called angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (or ACE-Is), also appeared to have a protective effect, although it was only about half as strong.

Dr Patrick Kehoe of Bristol University's school of clinical sciences and the charity Alzheimer's Research UK, who co-authored the report, said it was the first large-scale trial to find such an association.

He said: "If these results are borne out in clinical trials, then we'll have a swathe of drugs that could be used against Alzheimer's.

"On a personal level I'm very excited because this is something I have been working on for a decade."

However, he cautioned that their use to combat dementia was "a little way off" because the observational study, which used anonymised data from the General Practice Research Database, did not prove causation.

"That's the million dollar question," he added.

"Nobody should be rushing to their doctor saying they want to be put on these just yet."

However, results of the trial, published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease, did account for underlying differences in blood pressure between individuals.

This is important because people with high blood pressure are known to be at a higher risk of Alzheimer's and vascular dementia than others.

Dr Kehoe thus explained that the halving of risk was over and above anything brought about by the drugs' effect on lowering blood pressure.

He said laboratory studies showed that the drugs interacted with the root causes of Alzheimer's and vascular dementia.

Dr Simon Ridley, head of research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said: "This study highlights the potential for particular blood pressure drugs to help with Alzheimer's disease.

If these findings can be supported in clinical trials, this could be an important step forward.

"With over 820,000 people in the UK living with dementia, there is a desperate need to find new treatments and prevention strategies."

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**Dementia pills hope**  
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MODERN blood pressure drugs could dramatically slash the risk of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

A study found those taking ARBs had a 53 per cent reduced Alzheimer's risk, while those on ACE inhibitors had a 24 per cent lower chance.

Alzheimer's Research UK in Bristol said: "If these findings can be supported in clinical trials, this could be an important step."