

# DEMENTIA PREVENTION

## 12 MODIFIABLE RISK FACTORS AND THEIR MEANS OF PREVENTION

DEMENTIA PREVENTION,  
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### 1. EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

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Heavy drinking is associated with brain changes, cognitive impairment, and dementia. Thus, studies recommend limiting alcohol consumption to a minimum, as alcohol misuse and drinking more than 21 units weekly increase the risk of dementia.

### 2. SMOKING

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Avoid smoking uptake and support smoking cessation, as this reduces the risk of dementia even in later life. Your pharmacist or family doctor will be able to guide you through this process. Websites such as "J'arrête, j'y gagne" are also excellent tools.

### 3. OBESITY

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The progression of obesity, particularly among the elderly, is an emerging concern because it leads to a higher risk of developing dementia. Healthy lifestyle habits such as physical activity and a balanced diet are therefore recommended.

### 4. HYPERTENSION

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Sustained and untreated high blood pressure, especially in people over 40 years of age, increases the risk of dementia. Starting at age 40, it becomes important to monitor your blood pressure using a blood pressure monitor approved by Hypertension Canada and to notify your family doctor if your systolic blood pressure is consistently greater than or equal to 130mmHg. Your doctor will be able to make appropriate recommendations.

### 5. AIR POLLUTANTS

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Recent studies show a direct link between ambient air pollution and the development of dementia. Improving air quality depends greatly on sustainable development policies as well as the ecological actions taken by citizens on a daily basis. It is also possible to reduce the risks associated with air pollutants by avoiding exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke.

### 6. TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

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Repeated head injuries, such as concussions, significantly increase the risk of dementia. Head injury prevention includes wearing a helmet in high-risk activities such as downhill skiing, cycling, hockey, ATVing, motorcycling and other activities.

### 7. PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

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The studies are clear on the benefits of physical activity on neurocognitive development. An active lifestyle should therefore be favored in order to reduce the risk of dementia.

## 8. HEARING PROBLEM

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Only hearing losses that are not corrected by a device increase the risk of dementia. It is therefore important to consult your family doctor if you suspect a decrease in your hearing so that he can prescribe hearing aids according to your needs. Exposing yourself as little as possible to excessive noise is also a good mean of prevention.

## 9. DEPRESSION

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Depression and dementia are inextricably linked. This is because a depressive episode can increase the risk of dementia. Considering that no one is completely safe from depression, it is important to seek help from a health care professional as soon as possible. Adopting or maintaining a healthy lifestyle, having a good social network and knowing how to recognize the first symptoms of depression are important protective factors.

## 10. LOW LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND COGNITIVE STIMULATION

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Studies show that access to education plays a key role in the prevention of neurocognitive disorders. In fact, those who have the opportunity to continue their studies until the age of 20 are less likely to develop dementia. It is therefore important to value education and encourage children to continue their studies. In addition, some studies suggest that intellectual stimulation would be beneficial in preventing dementia. In order to do so, it is recommended to remain intellectually active throughout one's life by taking an interest in reading books, learning other languages, etc.

## 11. RARITY OF SOCIAL CONTACTS

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By promoting cognitive development, social contact reduces the risk of developing dementia. Thus, the more frequent the social contacts, the more the risk of developing a neurocognitive disorder decreases. It is therefore advantageous to invest in interpersonal relationships in addition to agreeing to expand your social network.

## 12. DIABETES

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Diabetes is associated with an increased risk of developing dementia. This risk factor increases with the duration and severity of diabetes. It is therefore recommended to opt for a varied and balanced diet, to be physically active and to watch for symptoms of diabetes such as increased appetite, constant thirst and more frequent urge to urinate.

### STATISTICS AND FACTS

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- Modifying these 12 risk factors might prevent or delay up to 40% of dementias.
- The studies are clear; it is never too late or too soon to change the risk factors for dementia.
- The quality of sleep may influence the development of neurocognitive disorders. Further studies on the subject are currently underway.
- Despite the lack of evidence, the WHO recommends the Mediterranean diet to reduce the risk of dementia.

