

Do This Kind of Work to Delay Alzheimer's

New research suggests key lifestyle factors may make all the difference

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Doing intellectually complex work and interacting with others may help forestall the effects of Alzheimer's disease, according to two studies released on Sunday.

Individuals in [one study](#) who had a "mentally stimulating lifestyle" were protected from the cognitive decline associated with the typical Western diet, according to Matthew Parrott, of Baycrest Health Sciences in Toronto, Ontario, and his colleagues.

The research followed 351 independently living older adults over three years. A diet of red and processed meats, white bread and potatoes, pre-packaged food and sweets was associated with cognitive decline, the study showed. But those individuals with mentally stimulating work and social engagement, as well as a higher education level, maintained cognitive function to a greater degree.

Researchers found that five categories of symptoms often precede memory loss in Alzheimer's: apathy; mood; impulse control; social appropriateness and perception.

"You can never totally forget about the importance of a good diet, but in terms of your risk of dementia, you are better able to accommodate some of the brain damage that is associated with consuming this kind of (unhealthy) diet," Parrott said at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Toronto, according to an [article](#) by [Tara Bahrampour](#) of The Washington Post.

Jobs associated with the most cognitive "help" were lawyer, teacher, social worker, engineer and doctor. Those offering the least protection included laborer, cashier, grocery shelf stocker and machine operator, the Post said.

→ People-Centered Work Helps, Too

Another [study](#) showed that healthy people with evidence of Alzheimer's in the brain show the highest cognitive function if they worked mostly with **people** rather than data or physical things. That research, which looked at spots of white matter on the brain scans of 284 people in late middle age, was conducted by the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute and the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center.

"These new data add to a growing body of research that suggests more stimulating lifestyles, including more complex work environments with other people, are associated with better cognitive outcomes in later life," said Maria C. Carrillo, Alzheimer's Association chief science officer, in a [written statement](#).

→ Early Alzheimer's Symptoms Different

A third [study](#) described symptoms of a newly identified condition called Mild Behavior Impairment (MBI), [the Post reported](#).

Most people assume that memory loss is the first symptom of Alzheimer's. But researchers including Dr. Zahinoor Ismail, a specialist in neuropsychiatry at the Hotchkiss Brain Institute at the University of Calgary, who presented the study, suggested otherwise.

They found that five categories of symptoms often precede memory loss in Alzheimer's: apathy; mood; impulse control; social appropriateness and perception. Specific symptoms include sadness, disorientation, panic episodes, aggressiveness or argumentativeness, frustration, stubbornness, hoarding and substance abuse, the Post said.

"Research is increasingly showing that if you're a midlife or older adult and you have a new onset of any of those neuropsychiatric symptoms, then you're more likely to decline and go on to mild cognitive impairment or dementia," the Post quoted Ismail as saying.

→ Play Those Games

Another study presented in Toronto examined the effect of three different kinds of “brain training” on older adults. Over a period of 10 years, 2,802 cognitively healthy older adults, whose average age was 73.4 when the study began, were divided into four groups, [the Los Angeles Times reported](#).

One of the groups got no training at all. Of the three other groups, one got a classroom course on strategies for boosting memory; another got a classroom course on sharpening reasoning skills and the third received computerized training to increase their visual processing ability, the Times reported. For those who took the computerized training, “the cumulative risk of developing cognitive decline or dementia over 10 years was 33 percent lower than for participants who got no training at all,” [the Times said](#).

The study was called ACTIVE — Advanced Cognitive Training for Independent and Vital Elderly. The National Institute on Aging provided funding.

The specific exercise tested was the “[Double Decision](#)” game, one of several brain games marketed by the San Francisco-based Posit Science Corp, the Times said.

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