



Stroke



# Dementia

This leaflet will help you to:

- Understand the link between dementia and cardiovascular disease
- Take action to reduce the risk of developing dementia
- Learn about services available for information and support



Heart disease



Diabetes



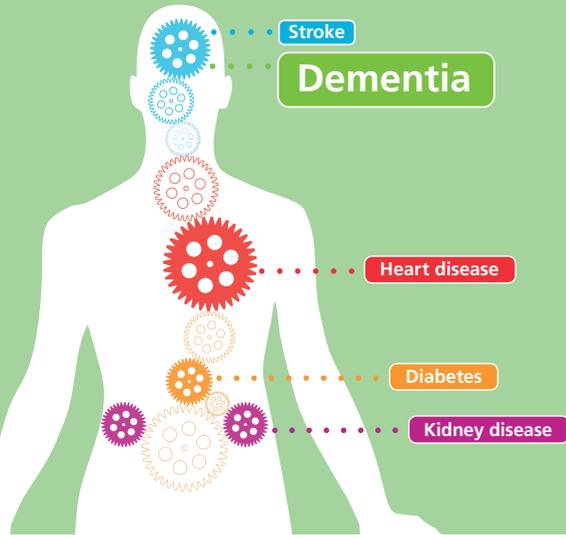
Kidney disease



# Free NHS Health Check

Helping you prevent heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease and dementia

# Why have I been given this information?



Risk factors that increase the chance of developing vascular disease e.g. heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease also increase the chance of developing dementia.

Evidence shows that taking action to adopt a healthier lifestyle can help to reduce your risk of developing dementia, as well as other vascular conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease.

## What is dementia?

Dementia describes a set of symptoms that affect the normal functions of the brain. There are many different types of dementia although some are far more common than others.

Around 60% of people with dementia have Alzheimer's disease, around 20% have vascular dementia and many people have a mixture of the two. There are other less common forms of dementia.

## The signs and symptoms of dementia

Symptoms of dementia vary depending on the cause and the area of the brain that is affected. Common symptoms include:

- Forgetfulness – this is usually the earliest and most noticeable symptom. For example, trouble recalling recent events or recognising people and places.

- Problems planning and carrying out tasks that people have previously managed without difficulty, such as managing finances, following a recipe or writing a letter.
- Feeling confused even when in a familiar environment.
- Trouble controlling moods or behaviours. Depression is common, and agitation or even aggression may occur.

It is important to know that forgetfulness can be caused by conditions other than dementia, such as depression, and that those conditions can be treated.

Also, occasional trouble with forgetfulness, such as briefly forgetting someone's name, can be a normal part of ageing.

## What are the risk factors for dementia?

There are some important factors that affect our risk of developing different types of dementia. Some of these factors can be modified and controlled, for example leading a healthier lifestyle, whereas others such as our age cannot be modified or changed.

Specific modifiable risk factors that are associated with dementia include:

### *Not having enough physical activity*

A lack of regular physical activity along with a sedentary lifestyle can increase the risk of developing vascular dementia, which is caused in part by problems with the circulation of blood to and around the brain.

### *Drinking too much*

Regularly drinking above recommended levels increases the risk of developing dementia. Drinking at high levels over time can directly cause a related condition called alcohol related brain damage.

### *Poor diet*

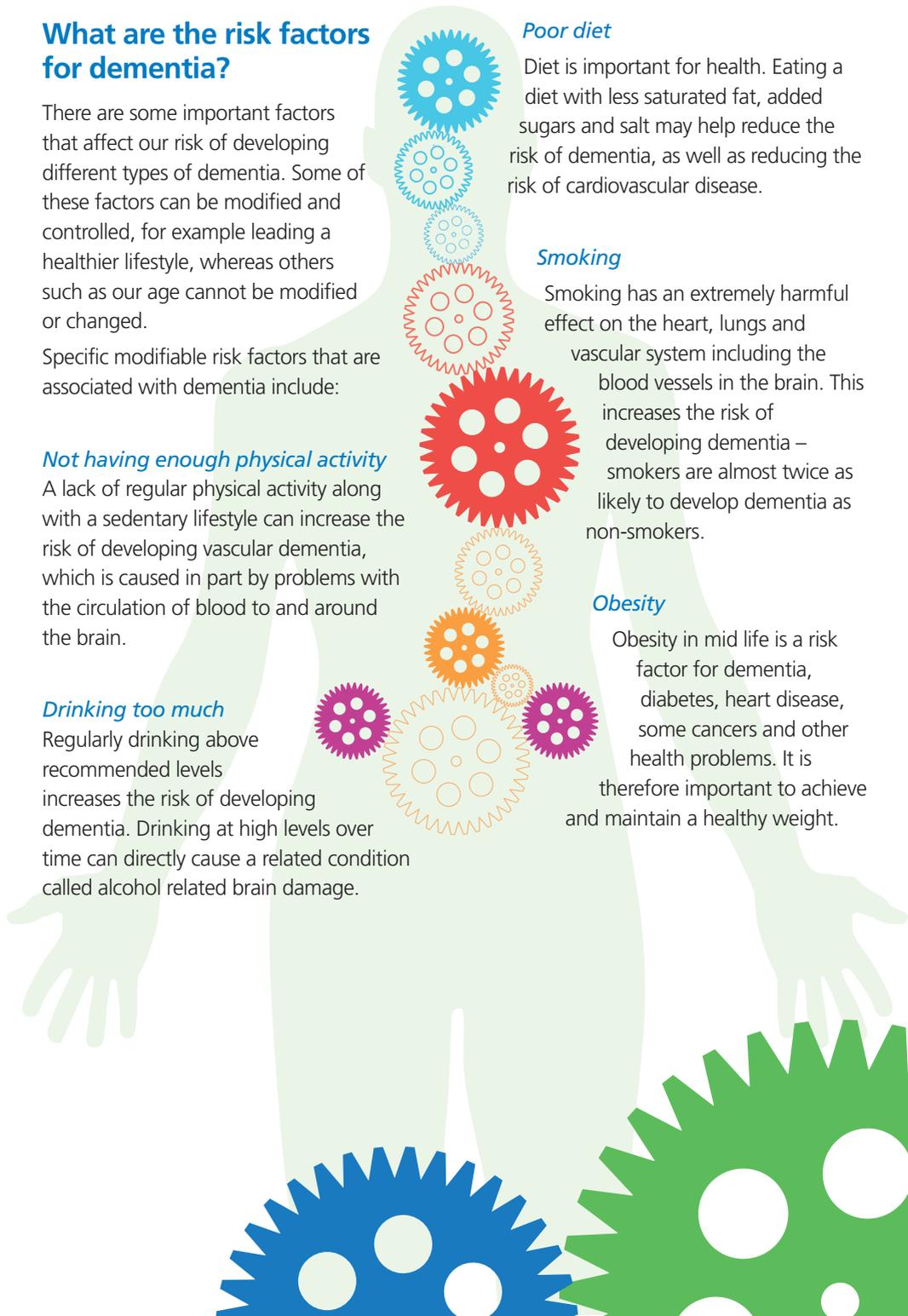
Diet is important for health. Eating a diet with less saturated fat, added sugars and salt may help reduce the risk of dementia, as well as reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

### *Smoking*

Smoking has an extremely harmful effect on the heart, lungs and vascular system including the blood vessels in the brain. This increases the risk of developing dementia – smokers are almost twice as likely to develop dementia as non-smokers.

### *Obesity*

Obesity in mid life is a risk factor for dementia, diabetes, heart disease, some cancers and other health problems. It is therefore important to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.



## How can I take action to reduce my risk of developing dementia?

### Keep physically active

Try to lead an active lifestyle and be physically active for at least 150 minutes a week. Not only will this help reduce your risk of dementia but also your risk of heart disease and diabetes.

### Get your measurements checked

Get your risk factors assessed and treated. For example, get your cholesterol and blood pressure checked regularly to ensure they are within recommended levels. This will help to reduce your risk of dementia, heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancer.

### Drink in moderation

If you drink alcohol, do so only in moderation. Men should not regularly drink more than 3 to 4 units a day and women should not regularly drink more than 2 to 3 units a day. And you should avoid alcohol for 48 hours after an episode of heavy drinking to allow your body tissues to recover.

### Eat a healthy, balanced diet

Eating a diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables and starchy foods and eating an oily fish each week together with reducing consumption of foods high in salt, saturated fat and added sugars will help you to keep your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol under control.

### Quit smoking

If you smoke, try to stop. This will be a huge benefit to your health in a number of ways as well as reducing your risk of dementia.

Becoming forgetful does not necessarily mean that a person has dementia so it is worth discussing any concerns with your doctor. Making a diagnosis of dementia is often difficult, particularly in the early stages, so doctors may refer you to a Memory Service for assessment.

“ Now I know that the risk factors for heart attacks and strokes also may



affect the likelihood of getting dementia, I can make the lifestyle changes that may help to reduce my risk of these diseases. It was also great to hear that there are dementia services available should me or my family ever need them. ”

## Where can I get more information?

If you are interested and would like to learn more about dementia, **Alzheimer's Society** provides information, support and guidance on a wide range of dementia related topics:

0300 222 11 22 (Alzheimer's Society National Dementia Helpline open 9.00am - 5.00pm weekdays, 10.00am - 4.00pm Saturday and Sunday)

info@alzheimers.org.uk (general information)  
helpline@alzheimers.org.uk (helpline)  
www.alzheimers.org.uk

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