

Alzheimer's: Can It Happen To Me?

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

As you age, concerns about physical health become prevalent, with Alzheimer's and dementia often taking center stage. Seniors have more fear of Alzheimer's than cancer, and the fear of eventually getting Alzheimer's has permeated our culture to the point that it has become the butt of the joke of our collective fear. When you forget your keys or what you had for dinner last, you claim a senior moment or jokingly say, "It must be early Alzheimers." But it's no joke. People have a lot of anxiety and fear about getting Alzheimer's to the point that their health anxiety affects their wellbeing. People look carefully at any slip of memory, assessing it as a symptom of the dreaded disease. Most people know someone who has Alzheimer's or someone caring for someone with Alzheimer's. This makes the fear more palpable. Most people know it is heritable, but there are some significant misunderstandings. More information about the disease does not necessarily increase your fear. And most people who have a lot of fear of it lack accurate information about these conditions.

What is Alzheimer's?

Dementia is a broad term for progressive neurological disorders affecting the brain. Alzheimer's, a type of dementia, hampers thinking and memory skills, disrupting daily life. While genetic factors may increase late-onset Alzheimer's risk, it doesn't guarantee inheritance. Although there's no cure, medications and treatments exist.

Can Alzheimer's be prevented?

While certain lifestyle factors, often touted for their potential preventive impact on Alzheimer's, lack conclusive evidence, they do hold a perceived credibility. These factors, encompassing a healthy diet, physical activity, weight management, and blood pressure control, are commonly

advocated for reducing risks. Additionally, social engagement and mental stimulation are thought to contribute to preventing Alzheimer's.

Assessing Your Risk

Understanding personal risks involves self-assessment and professional guidance. Steps include evaluating lifestyle, medical and family history, consulting healthcare providers, cognitive assessments, and genetic counseling.

Lowering Risk Through Lifestyle Choices

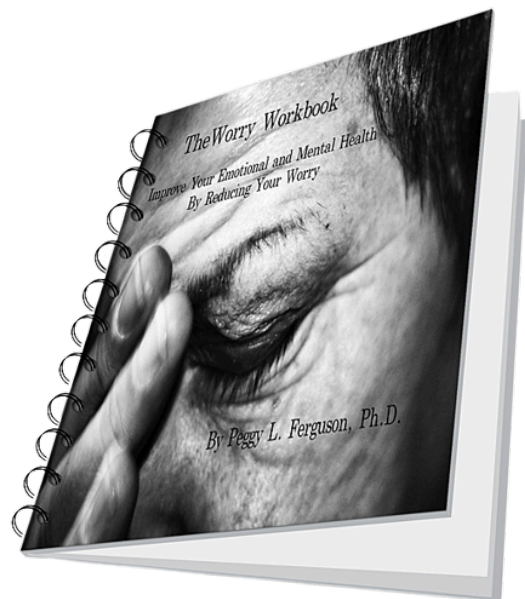
The National Institute on Aging recommends the lifestyle choices listed below to reduce dementia risk:

1. Use your brain: Engage in reading, games, crafts, learning, work, volunteering, and socializing.
2. Stay connected: Social activities prevent isolation linked to cognitive decline.
3. Mind your hearing: Protect ears to avoid hearing loss affecting cognition. Get and use hearing aids if you need them.
4. Mental and physical health: Get screenings, manage depression, and check in regularly with healthcare providers.
5. Sleep well: Aim for 7-8 hours for psychological and physical wellbeing.
6. Prevent head injury: Avoid falls and head injuries by fall-proofing homes and participating in prevention programs.
7. Limit alcohol: Moderate drinking prevents falls and health issues.
8. Quit smoking: Smoking cessation improves health and reduces disease risk.
9. Control high blood pressure: Manage with medication, exercise, and exercise.
10. Maintain a healthy weight: Active lifestyle and healthy food choices reduce related health risks.
11. Manage blood sugar: Healthy choices and exercise help control blood sugar.

12. Eat healthy: Include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and limit fats and sugars.
13. Keep moving: At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity weekly is recommended.

Incorporating these choices into daily life will help your general health and may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's. Arm yourself with accurate information to assess your health.

Health anxiety is not the only source of worry for seniors. "The Worry Workbook" is an invaluable resource for reducing the concern that negatively impacts life and undermines overall wellbeing. It can serve as your guide to unraveling the complexities of your worries. By fostering self-awareness and reflection, it aids in pinpointing the roots of your concerns and exploring options for problem-solving. It teaches about changing cognitive and emotional components while encouraging exploration of the influence of lifestyle on stressors. The practical tools and recommendations will help you shift how you approach worry and guide you toward a more mindful and resilient life.



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