



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
Trusted advice for a healthier life

Can you sidestep Alzheimer's disease?



Alzheimer's disease is characterized by progressive damage to nerve cells and their connections. The result is devastating and includes memory loss, impaired thinking, difficulties with verbal communication, and even personality changes. A person with Alzheimer's disease may live anywhere from two to 20 years after diagnosis. Those years are spent in an increasingly dependent state that exacts a staggering emotional, physical, and economic toll on families.

A number of factors influence the likelihood that you will develop Alzheimer's disease. Some of these you can't control, such as age, gender, and family history. But there are things you can do to help lower your risk. As it turns out, the mainstays of a healthy lifestyle — exercise, watching your weight, and eating right — appear to lower Alzheimer's risk.



5 steps to lower Alzheimer's risk

While there are no surefire ways to prevent Alzheimer's, by following the five steps below you may lower your risk for this disease — and enhance your overall health as well.

1. **Maintain a healthy weight.** Cut back on calories and increase physical activity if you need to shed some pounds.
2. **Check your waistline.** To accurately measure your waistline, use a tape measure around the narrowest portion of your waist (usually at the height of the navel and lowest rib). A National Institutes of Health panel recommends waist measurements of no more than 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men.
3. **Eat mindfully.** Emphasize colorful, vitamin-packed vegetables and fruits; whole grains; protein sources such as fish, lean poultry, tofu, and beans and other legumes; plus healthy fats. Cut down on unnecessary calories from sweets, sodas, refined grains like white bread or white rice, unhealthy fats, fried and fast foods, and mindless snacking. Keep a close eye on portion sizes, too.
4. **Exercise regularly.** This simple step does great things for your body. Regular physical activity helps control weight, blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol. Moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise (walking, swimming, biking, rowing) can also help chip away total body fat and abdominal fat over time. Aim for 2 1/2 to 5

hours weekly of brisk walking (at 4 mph). Or try a vigorous exercise like jogging (at 6 mph) for half that time.

5. **Keep an eye on important health numbers.** In addition to watching your weight and waistline, ask your doctor whether your cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, and blood sugar are within healthy ranges. Exercise, weight loss if needed, and medications (if necessary) can help keep these numbers on target.