How can I reduce my risk of dementia?

Many people worry about developing dementia, particularly if they have a close relative with the condition.

This leaflet provides advice on the steps you can take to reduce your risk or delay the onset of dementia.
Research has found some important factors that affect our risk of dementia. Some of them, such as your family genes, your medical history, whether you are male or female, and your age cannot be controlled. There are other things that we may be able to change, such as our lifestyle.

Although many of us may develop dementia, some of us are more at risk than others. By avoiding the risk factors in this leaflet and leading a healthier lifestyle we may reduce our risk or delay the onset of dementia.

It is important to note that someone who has some of the risk factors for dementia will not always go on to develop it. However, a person without any risk factors may still develop it. Reduce your risk by making your lifestyle healthier today.
Diet can affect a person’s risk of many types of illness, including dementia.

A healthy diet that helps a person to maintain a normal body weight is likely to reduce the chance of developing high blood pressure or heart disease, both of which put a person at greater risk of dementia.

Try to eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals and bread, calcium-rich foods (low-fat milk and dairy products) and foods containing vitamin D such as eggs and oily fish.

Reducing the level of sugar, salt and saturated fats in your diet (such as fatty meats, full fat dairy products, biscuits and cakes) may help to lower the risk of dementia.

Exercise
Keeping active is important for brain health as well as heart health. Research shows that regular exercise in middle aged or older adults can improve thinking and memory, and may reduce the risk of developing some types of dementia. Try to be active for at least 30 minutes, five times a week, with an activity such as brisk walking or cycling.

For more advice on keeping active contact Doncaster Council’s Active Doncaster Team on 01302 735403 or visit www.doncaster.gov.uk/publichealth
Healthy Weight
Obesity increases someone’s chances of developing risk factors for dementia, such as high blood pressure and diabetes. This means people who are obese, especially in mid-life, are at an increased risk of dementia. Eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly will help people to avoid becoming obese and (in most cases) maintain a healthy body weight.

Diabetes
There is a strong link between type 2 diabetes and the risk of dementia. There are things that you can do to reduce your risk of developing diabetes, such as staying at a healthy weight, being active and eating a balanced diet that is low in fat and sugar.

If you already have diabetes, it’s important to manage your condition well.

Cholesterol
Evidence shows that high cholesterol levels in mid-life can increase your risk of dementia later on. People over the age of 40 should have their cholesterol levels checked to make sure they are within a healthy range. Eating a healthy diet and keeping active will help you to maintain healthy cholesterol levels. Speak to your GP for further information.

For more information on healthy eating and weight management go to www.doncaster.gov.uk/publichealth
High blood pressure significantly increases the chance of developing dementia in later life. If you are over the age of 40 you should get your blood pressure checked regularly and follow medical advice to keep it under control.

If you are between 40-74 years of age you can have a free NHS Health Check every 5 years. The check is quick and simple and is for to people living in Doncaster who are not currently under the care of a doctor for stroke, heart or blood pressure problems, diabetes, kidney disease and or taking statins.

It takes just a few minutes and is totally free and confidential. Please visit www.doncaster.gov.uk/publichealth or call 01302 315007 to find out where and when you can have your health checked.
Mental well-being

Taking part in activities (such as reading, learning and doing puzzles) may help to reduce the development of dementia.

Taking up new hobbies or learning new skills are great ways to challenge your brain and keep it active. Being more socially active has also been shown to reduce the risk of developing dementia. People with depression are probably at a greater risk of developing dementia.

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, you should seek help from the GP because it can be treated, either with drugs or talking therapies (or both).

For more information contact RDaSH Talking Shop on 01302 565650 www.rdash.nhs.uk/21690/talking-shop

or MIND on 01302 812190 www.mind.org.uk
**Smoking**

Smoking has a very harmful effect on the heart, lungs and blood vessels, including those in the brain. Research shows that smokers have a 50 per cent greater chance of developing dementia than those who have never smoked.

If you want help to stop smoking please contact Rotherham and Doncaster Smokefree Service on 0800 612 0011.

**Alcohol**

Drinking above safe levels of alcohol significantly increases the risk of developing dementia such as Alzheimer’s and vascular dementia.

NHS guidelines suggest that men should not regularly drink more than 3–4 units of alcohol a day, and women should not regularly drink more than 2–3 units a day.

A pint of lower-strength lager and a standard 175ml glass of wine each contain around two units of alcohol.

If you are concerned you may be drinking too much take a quick test at www.drinkaware.co.uk or contact Doncaster Drug and Alcohol Service on 01302 730956.
Further reading
Get some practical tips from the NHS on how you can make healthier choices for a healthier life by visiting:-
www.nhs.uk/livewell
www.nhs.uk/change4life/
www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Toolslibrary.aspx

For more information about a wide range of dementia-related topics visit www.alzheimers.org.uk or email the Doncaster branch on doncaster@alzheimers.org.uk

Find out more about living well with dementia at www.doncaster.gov.uk/dementia

This leaflet has been produced on behalf of Doncaster Dementia Strategic Partnership and the Doncaster Dementia Action Alliance