



*Thoughts from
Dr. Amy*

10 Lifestyle Moves That Could Lower Your Dementia Risk by 35 Percent



More than 5 million Americans are living with dementia. The two most common forms of this progressive memory-robbing disorder are Alzheimer's disease (AD) and vascular dementia, both of which are linked to problems with the heart and blood vessels. AD alone ranks as the most expensive disease in the U.S., costing up to \$215 billion a year, more than double the cost of heart disease or cancer. What's more, rates of dementia are expected to triple in coming decades due to the aging of the population.

The good news, however, is that an optimal lifestyle can dramatically reduce your risk of developing dementia, according to a study by 24 leading experts published in *The Lancet*. The experts identified nine potentially reversible lifestyle risk factors — and suggest that by eliminating them, 35% of dementia cases may be preventable. Research by the BaleDoneen Method and other scientists has added a tenth factor to the list. Here's a look at ten ways to protect your brain health and keep your memory sharp.

1. Have your hearing checked — A surprising new discovery: Several studies report that even mild hearing loss raises dementia risk, while more severe hearing loss doubles or triples the threat. Hearing may be important to protecting memory because of what study lead author, University College London professor Gill Livingston, calls "the use it or lose it" model. "We get a lot of intellectual stimulation through hearing," she told *Vox*. Researchers theorize that hearing aids may help reduce dementia risk, but further study is needed to find out for sure.

2. Rev up your brain — Like your body, your mind needs exercise to stay fit. Research shows that highly educated people are less likely to suffer memory loss, possibly because keeping the brain active boosts its "cognitive reserve," allowing it to work efficiently even if some cells are damaged. A wide range of activities provide healthy stimulation: A study of older nuns and priests found that those who spent the most time listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, going to museums and doing puzzles had a 47% lower rate of AD. More brain-boosters: learning a foreign language, taking courses at a community college, and playing games, such as bridge or Scrabble.

3. Avoid nicotine use and exposure to secondhand smoke — Nicotine exposure damages the cardiovascular system and reduces oxygen flow to the brain. Magnifying the danger to your most important organ: Cigarette smoke and nicotine contain neurotoxins that increase oxidative stress, inflammation and risk for strokes and smaller bleeds in the brain, all of which are risk factors for dementia. Kicking the habit — and avoiding secondhand smoke — have been shown to lower risk dramatically, while continuing to use nicotine in any form has been shown to raise the threat of memory loss by up to 220%!

4. Move more — Regular exercise trims your waistline and keeps your wits sharp. Columbia researchers reported that older adults who exercised vigorously 1.3 hours a week were 33% less likely to develop Alzheimer's, compared to couch potatoes of the same age. But those who combined physical activity, such as jogging, hiking, or biking, with the Mediterranean diet got even greater benefit, whittling their AD risk by 60% over the 5½-year study. In a recent analysis of studies that included nearly 200,000 people, those who exercised the most had a 38% lower risk for cognitive decline.

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Women's Heart Attacks Are More Likely to Be Fatal: Top 10 Prevention Tips

Large studies published this year reveal an alarming trend: Women are up to three times more likely to die after a heart attack than men, largely due to unequal care and treatment. Women are less likely to receive the same risk-factor assessments and diagnostic tests for cardiovascular disease (CVD), leading to women being 50% more likely to be initially misdiagnosed. After a heart attack, women are less likely to receive procedures to reopen blocked arteries, such as stents or bypass surgery; and medications to reduce risk for a second heart attack, such as statins or aspirin, despite guidelines calling for these treatments to be prescribed for both genders.

Part of the problem is the lingering myth that CVD is mainly a problem for men. In reality, it is the leading killer of both men and women, often from heart attacks or strokes, claiming more female lives than all forms of cancer combined. Another scary fact: 64% of women who die suddenly from a heart attack were previously unaware that they had CVD. The key takeaway is that women need to be their own advocates for optimal cardiovascular care and take action NOW to avoid heart attacks and strokes. Here are the BaleDoneen Method's top ten prevention tips, drawn from a recent women's heart health presentation by Dr. Amy Doneen:

1. Get educated — Get educated. Every 43 seconds someone in the U.S. has a heart attack, and on average, one American dies from a stroke every four minutes. However, as discussed more fully in the BaleDoneen book, *Beat the Heart Attack Gene*, all heart attacks and strokes are potentially preventable — even if you have already suffered one or more of these events. Our method uses advanced lab and imaging tests to directly check each patient for hidden signs of arterial disease, including [a painless ultrasound exam of the neck arteries](#). If plaque is found in your arteries, you are at risk for a heart attack or stroke and need the optimal care of the BaleDoneen Method, which has been shown in two [peer-reviewed studies](#) to halt or reverse the disease. Also ask your medical provider to check you for [cardiovascular red flags](#).

2. Move more — Exercise has such powerful mental and physical benefits that it's been called "the ultimate wonder drug." For people with genetic risk for heart attack, exercise has been shown [in a new study](#) to lower that risk by 50%! To keep your heart healthy, the American Heart Association and the BaleDoneen Method recommend a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate physical activity a week, such as walking, jogging, biking, or swimming. [Workouts that target belly fat](#) also have important benefits: A recent study reported that losing just two inches from your waist can significantly reduce blood pressure, cholesterol and other heart attack risks. Always check with your medical provider before starting a new workout to make sure it's right for you.

3. Follow a healthy lifestyle — An optimal lifestyle [reduces CVD and stroke risk by up to 90%](#)! Take excellent care of your heart by following these simple tips: [Shake the sugar habit](#). A high-sugar diet has been shown to triple risk for fatal CVD, while a diet that's high in fruit and vegetables has the opposite effect. Maintain a healthy weight: If getting to your ideal weight seems daunting, start with a more modest goal. Shedding as

few as 7 to 10 pounds reduces risk for type 2 diabetes (a major risk factor for heart disease) by up to 70%, even if you are already pre-diabetic. Look for ways to tame tension: A large study in 52 countries found that psychological factors, including stress, nearly tripled heart attack risk. Practice [mindfulness](#) and other relaxing activities, such as laughter yoga.

4. No nicotine — Every year, secondhand smoke causes more than 8,000 deaths from stroke, while smoking (and other types of nicotine use, such as vaping or chewing tobacco) causes one in three deaths from CVD. Smoking makes blood stickier and more likely to clot, which can block blood flow to the heart (triggering a heart attack) or the brain (leading to a stroke). In addition, women who smoke die up to 19 years sooner than nonsmokers! Even one cigarette daily has been shown to dramatically increase risk for heart attack, stroke and early death.

5. Check blood pressure — Sixty-seven million Americans — about one in three adults — have high blood pressure (a reading of 140/90 or higher), and 70 million have pre-hypertension (a reading of 120/80 to 139/89). Although elevated blood pressure is the leading risk for stroke and a major contributor to heart disease, many people who have it aren't aware of their condition or don't have it under control. Yet high blood pressure is highly treatable with weight loss, dietary and lifestyle changes and, in many cases, medications. A large study found that for each 10 mm Hg drop in blood pressure, heart attack risk fell by 50%! Also be aware of [new blood pressure guidelines](#) and discuss your numbers with your medical provider.

6. Get checked for ALL dangerous types of cholesterol — Most patients assume that the standard cholesterol test known as "a lipid profile" or "coronary risk panel" checks for all forms of dangerous cholesterol that raise heart attack and stroke risk. However, [most healthcare providers don't test patients for a common inherited-cholesterol](#)



disorder: elevated levels of lipoprotein (a), a type of cholesterol that triples risk for heart attacks. Statins don't work well for this disorder, but it can be treated with niacin (vitamin B) and other therapies. If the results are normal, this \$20 test only needs to be done once in a lifetime.

7. Get checked for pre-diabetes — It's very common for people to be diagnosed with diabetes or insulin resistance (IR), a disorder also known as "prediabetes," shortly after they suffer a heart attack. While these conditions may sound unrelated, actually IR is [the underlying cause of 70% of heart attacks](#). BaleDoneen and other studies show that the most accurate screening test for IR, prediabetes and diabetes is the 2-hour oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT). In the time it would take to watch a movie, you can find out if you have IR, which can often be treated or reversed with lifestyle changes. Rated as "the gold standard" in accuracy by the American Diabetes Association, this test is covered by almost every health plan.

8. Get dental care at least twice a year — If you haven't seen your dentist lately, here's some powerful motivation to make an appointment: Keeping your gums healthy could help you avoid a heart attack! Conversely, having periodontal (gum) disease due to certain high-risk oral bacteria can actually cause cardiovascular disease, according to a landmark BaleDoneen study [published in Postgraduate Medical Journal](#). Follow our easy four-step plan to optimize your oral health, which includes being checked for gum disease and high-risk oral pathogens and a program of home care to disinfect your mouth.

9. Sleep well — Regardless of other risk factors, people who don't sleep enough face an increased threat of CVD. [In a study of about 3,000 people over the age of 45](#), those who snoozed fewer than six hours a night were twice as likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke as people who slept six to eight hours a night. The sweet spot for slumber is six to eight hours a night. Try these [five natural ways to sleep better](#) to ensure that you get the heart-healthy rest you need.

10. Save a life — Tell a friend and teach a friend what you learned here. You could save a life!

Perfectly Baked Salmon with Lemon and Dill



Adapted from [InspiredTaste.com](#) and [thekitchn.com](#)



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on heart health and wellness.

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5. Get high blood pressure under control — One in three U.S. adults has high blood pressure, a condition that is more dangerous to arterial health than smoking or obesity. That's dangerous because high blood pressure is the leading risk factor for stroke, which in turn can lead to vascular dementia. Large studies have shown that high blood pressure in midlife can double risk for Alzheimer's in old age — and the higher your blood pressure is, the greater the threat. Although high blood pressure is the leading cause of death and disability worldwide, it's also the most preventable. In addition, as we recently reported, [five healthy lifestyle steps can reduce stroke risk by 90%](#).

6. Keep in touch with friends — Get-togethers with friends, neighbors or family can have a surprising payoff, Harvard researchers report. In their study of people in their 50s and 60s, those who were the most socially connected had half the rate of memory loss during the six-year study as those who were socially isolated.

7. Maintain a healthy weight — Nearly 40% of Americans — about 100 million people — are obese. Defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher, obesity raises risk for dementia by up to 92%, the Lancet study reported. Excess weight also greatly magnifies risk for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, several forms of cancer and joint disorders. However, the wonderful news is that even modest weight loss can significantly improve your arterial and overall wellness. Try [our seven science-backed weight loss tips](#) to get rid of unwanted pounds and boost brain health.

8. Keep your blood sugar in check — Abnormal blood sugar levels are the root cause of about 70% of heart attacks and such a powerful risk factor for memory loss that some experts have proposed

•August Recipe•

Ready in 30 minutes or less and packed with heart-healthy nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids, this easy salmon recipe pairs perfectly with a cucumber vinaigrette salad for a tasty meal that's sure to delight your family and friends. For a flavor variation, replace dill with other fresh herbs of your choice, such as tarragon, basil or parsley, or substitute 3 tablespoons of chopped pistachio nuts for the dill and shallot. Serves four to six.

INGREDIENTS

One 1 1/2 pound salmon filet, skin on, preferably wild-caught
1/2 cup dry white wine or fish stock
Freshly ground pepper
Pinch of salt (optional)
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 small shallot, finely chopped
2 tablespoons fresh dill, chopped, plus extra for serving
Zest from one lemon (about a tablespoon)

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 325° F. Season both sides of salmon with salt (if using) and pepper. Place in baking dish, skin side down, and add wine or stock. Combine olive oil, chopped shallot, dill and lemon zest into a paste and coat top of salmon. Cover baking dish with aluminum foil and bake until the fish flakes (15 to 30 minutes, depending on the thickness of the filet). To avoid overcooking, check internal temperature of the salmon with a food thermometer after 15 minutes; the fish is done when the thickest part of the filet reaches 135° F. Remove from oven and cover loosely with foil for five minutes. Serve with additional dill sprinkled on top and enjoy!

renaming Alzheimer's disease "type 3 diabetes." One explanation is that having type 2 diabetes or prediabetes may reduce flow of blood and essential nutrients to the brain by damaging blood vessels. As we recently reported, one in three adults — 84 million Americans — have prediabetes, and 90% of them are undiagnosed, magnifying their risk for heart attack, stroke and dementia. Talk to your medical provider about getting the most accurate screening test for blood sugar abnormalities: the two-hour oral glucose tolerance test.

9. Get depression treated — It's not yet known if depression contributes to dementia or whether the memory-robbing disorder increases risk for depression. However, the Lancet researchers contend that it's "biologically plausible" that depression could be a dementia risk because it "affects stress hormones, neuronal growth factors, and hippocampus (brain) volume." The study also reports that some medications for depression may be protective against dementia, though further study is needed.

10. Ask your dental provider to check you for gum disease and oral bacteria — A [2017 study](#) linked periodontal disease (PD) — a chronic infection of the gums that affects the majority of adults over age 30 — to a 70% higher risk for Alzheimer's disease in people who had the oral infection for ten or more years. A landmark, [peer-reviewed BaleDoneen study](#), published in Postgraduate Medical Journal, was the first to identify high-risk oral bacteria from PD as a contributing cause of cardiovascular disease, the leading killer of Americans, while other studies have shown that taking optimal care of your teeth and gums can add years to your life. Follow [our easy, four-step plan](#) to optimize your oral health, which includes asking your dental provider to check for these bacterial villains with available diagnostic tests that measure oral pathogens through DNA analysis, including OralDNA, OraVital and Hain Diagnostics.