

Brain Health

Protecting Memory, Mood, and Independence Before Symptoms

14 modifiable risk factors for dementia

The 2024 Lancet Commission estimates that fully addressing these factors across life could prevent or delay about 45% of dementia cases worldwide. This is a population estimate—not a promise of a 45% reduction in your personal risk.

RISK FACTOR	A PRACTICAL NEXT STEP
EARLY LIFE	
01 Less education	Support access to good schooling. Keep learning as an adult.
MIDLIFE	
02 Hearing loss	Protect ears from loud noise. Get hearing checked; use hearing aids when prescribed.
03 High LDL cholesterol *	Review your cholesterol and treatment plan with your clinician.
04 Depression	Low mood or loss of interest deserves care. See page 2 for screening and support.
05 Traumatic brain injury	Use seat belts and appropriate helmets. Reduce falls and repeated head impacts.
06 Physical inactivity	Build toward 150 minutes of moderate activity weekly and 2 strength days. Adapt as needed.
07 Smoking	Ask about support to quit, including counseling and medicines.
08 Diabetes	Check blood sugar when due. Follow an individualized care plan.
09 High blood pressure (hypertension)	Know your readings. Ask what targets and treatment are right for you.
10 Obesity	Seek individualized weight care that protects your strength.
11 Excessive alcohol consumption	Drink less or not at all. Do not start drinking for brain health.
LATER LIFE	
12 Social isolation	Plan a regular call, shared meal, class, or visit with friends.
13 Air pollution	Reduce polluted-air exposure when possible. Cleaner air also takes community action.
14 Untreated vision loss *	Get eye care, glasses, or cataract treatment as needed.

* Added in 2024: high LDL cholesterol and untreated vision loss.

Life stages follow the report's model, not deadlines for action. Modifiable does not mean entirely in your control. Access, community, and care matter. Dementia is not a personal failure.

Memory, mood, and support.

You do not have to wait for a crisis to ask for help.

When memory changes

An occasional lapse can be normal. **New, repeated, or worsening** trouble with familiar tasks, bills, medicines, or directions deserves a visit. Bring examples; review sleep, mood, hearing, and medicines. Do not stop prescriptions on your own.

Mood deserves care, too

Depression can include low mood, lost interest, irritability, low energy, and changes in sleep or concentration. Bring it up when symptoms last about two weeks—or sooner if you are struggling.

Anxiety can bring hard-to-control worry, tension, or avoidance. Seek help when it affects sleep, relationships, or daily life. Both can affect thinking; neither means you have dementia.

Screening starts a conversation

Ask about **PHQ-2 / PHQ-9** for depression and **GAD-2 / GAD-7** for anxiety. These questionnaires are not a diagnosis. Review results with a clinician and agree on follow-up.

Free self-checks: screening.mhanational.org

Therapy and treatment

Talk therapy, including **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**, teaches skills for thoughts and behavior. Therapy, medicines, or both can help; healthy habits do not replace needed treatment.

Start with primary care or your insurance. Ask about low-cost clinics, telehealth, and a therapist who understands your background.

[FindTreatment.gov](https://findtreatment.gov) — free treatment directory; care costs vary.

[OpenPathCollective.org](https://openpathcollective.org) — reduced-fee therapy. Session and membership fees apply.

One next step: _____ **Support / resource:** _____

Sudden change or crisis?

Call 911 for sudden confusion, speech trouble, one-sided weakness, vision loss, or a sudden severe headache—even if it improves. For emotional crisis or suicidal thoughts, **call / text 988** (U.S.). In immediate danger, call 911.

Education, not a diagnosis or personal treatment plan.

Beyond the 14

Sleep and food are not separate factors in the Lancet model. Aim for **7–9 hours of sleep**; ask about loud snoring, breathing pauses, or daytime sleepiness. Enjoy beans, greens, whole grains, nuts, and fish. Frozen vegetables and canned beans count.

Tests and supplements. Alzheimer's blood tests are not routine screening without symptoms. No over-the-counter supplement is proven to prevent dementia.

Support for caregivers

Caring for someone with dementia, depression, or bipolar disorder? **Support is for you, too.** Ask for a specific task to be shared or a regular break.

PrognosUs | PAID OPTIONS

Culturally responsive dementia education and caregiver communities. Membership fees apply; ask about financial support or eligibility for no-cost services.

prognosus.com

Alzheimer's Association | FREE

24/7 dementia Helpline: **800-272-3900**. Get caregiving guidance, support, and local resources.

alz.org

Family Caregiver Alliance | FREE TOOLS

CareNav offers a free personal resource dashboard and caregiver education. Registration is required; other services may have eligibility or fees.

caregiver.org → [CareNav](https://carenav.org)

NAMI Family Support Group | FREE

Peer-led groups for adult family and friends of people with mental health conditions, including depression and bipolar disorder. Many meet online.

nami.org → [Family Support Group](https://family.supportgroup.org)

Peer support and education are not therapy or crisis care. Check local availability.