

## Talking with patients about risk reduction for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias

Your patients probably don't know that choices they make starting as early as their teen years are linked to 14 modifiable risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD).<sup>1</sup>

What they *do* know is that you're the expert who can advise them how to maintain healthy cognition as long as possible. As a family physician, you have opportunities to talk with your patients about their risk of developing ADRD before they have concerns, when they still have time to make impactful changes.

You can help your patients address some of the key ADRD risk factors by talking with them about preventive measures **at every visit**—from back-to-school checkups to Medicare annual wellness visits. Approach these conversations in a way that feels natural for the patient's life stage.

The earlier your patients adopt healthy habits to reduce ADRD risk, the greater the potential cumulative effect on their long-term brain health. But it's never too late to start making better choices.

### Building brain health in early life

Your patients in their teens and 20s might not be thinking about ADRD, but they're often making decisions that are linked to brain health over time, such as whether to pursue additional education or other mentally challenging activities.

#### Frame the conversation:

"Keeping your brain active at this age can help reduce the risk of developing dementia as you get older."

#### Then get into details:

- "How do you see yourself continuing to learn and challenge your mind after [high school/college]?" (Risk factor: **Less education**)

### References

<sup>1</sup>Livingston G, Huntley J, Liu KY, et al. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the *Lancet* standing commission. *Lancet*. 2024;404(10452):572-628.

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### Supporting brain health in midlife

Your patients in their 30s, 40s and 50s might be most focused on avoiding or managing chronic conditions. To give them even more motivation to make healthy choices, highlight how actions they take to reduce chronic disease risk also matter for long-term brain health.

#### Frame the conversation:

"Making good choices for your health now can help reduce some risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia over time."

#### Then get into details:

- "Do you regularly take the medicine prescribed to manage your chronic conditions as directed?" (Risk factors: **High LDL cholesterol; high blood pressure; type 2 diabetes**)
- "How do you cope with any feelings of hopelessness or stress?" (Risk factor: **Depression**)
- "Do you exercise?" (Risk factor: **Physical inactivity**)
- "Are you maintaining a healthy weight?" (Risk factor: **Obesity**)
- "Do you keep your headphones at a reasonable volume?" (Risk factor: **Hearing loss**)
- "Do you use a helmet when you ride a bike, motorcycle or electric scooter?" (Risk factor: **Traumatic brain injury**)
- "Do you use tobacco or alcohol?" (Risk factors: **Smoking; excessive alcohol use**)

### Preserving brain health in later life

You're already screening your older patients for dementia during Medicare annual wellness visits. That's also a good opportunity to address ADRD prevention.

#### Frame the conversation:

"By paying attention to three things that affect your quality of life now, you can also address factors associated with dementia risk over time."

#### Then get into details:

- "How often do you spend time with or talk to friends or family?" (Risk factor: **Social isolation**)
- "When did you last have your vision checked?" (Risk factor: **Vision loss**)
- "Does anyone smoke in your home? Do you live in an area with poor air quality?" (Risk factor: **Air pollution**)