

HEALTHY HEART AT THE AGE OF 50 CAN HELP LOWER THE RISK OF DEMENTIA

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A HEALTHY heart in middle age lowers the risk of developing dementia in later years, a study says.

Those who quit smoking, ate healthily and exercised in midlife boosted their chances of avoiding the condition.

The research, which looked at nearly 1,500 subjects of a longterm study, confirmed previous theories that behaviour such as diet and not smoking can benefit brain health in old age.

Lead author Yajun Liang, of the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, said: 'Maintaining life-long health behaviours may be crucial to reduce late-life risk of dementia.

We observed that having the ideal CVH [cardiovascular health] metrics, and ideal behavioural CVH metrics in particular, from midlife onwards is associated with a reduced risk of dementia.'

Previous research suggested global dementia numbers could be cut by a third if modifiable risks were eliminated.

However, until the current study, which was published in the journal PLOS Medicine, there was a lack of evidence on potential links between the risk of late-life dementia and heart health in midlife and late life.

The team analysed data on 1,449 participants in the Finnish Cardiovascular Risk Factors, Ageing and Dementia study, enrolled between 1972 and 1987 and assessed in 1998, starting from an average age of 50. A further 744 dementia-free survivors were studied again between 2005-2008.

Participants' heart health was evaluated according to six factors - three behavioural (smoking status, physical activity, and body mass index) and three biological (blood sugar levels, total cholesterol, and blood pressure).

Dementia was diagnosed in 61 people in the first follow up and 47 more in the second. The researchers found participants with intermediate or ideal CVH scores from midlife onwards, especially for behavioural factors, had a lower risk of dementia later in life.

They found no significant overall association between heart health scores measured in late life and risk of dementia. But when looking at biological factors, ideal scores in late life were associated with greater risk of dementia.

The authors say this could be because some biological hallmarks of dementia might overlap with 'ideal' scores such as lower blood pressure and lower cholesterol.

They note limitations of the study include a lack of data on diet and high rate of attrition. health benefits, from reducing stress and improving heart health to boosting mood and concentration, too.