

- Brain—diseases

Seven simple steps could slash dementia risk – study

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Adopting seven healthy habits can lower the risk of dementia by up to 43%, even in people genetically predisposed to developing it, research has found.

Those who are active, eat well, lose weight, do not smoke, and keep their blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar under control are up to 43% less likely to develop the condition.

However, it was not previously clear whether those habits were still helpful in people whose genes put them at higher risk.

“Even for people who are at the highest genetic risk, living this same healthier lifestyle [is likely to] lower risk of dementia,” said the study’s author, Dr Adrienne Tin from the University of Mississippi Medical Centre.

For the study, published online in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology, researchers followed almost 12,000 people living in the United States for 30 years. Around 9000 had European ancestry and 3000 had African ancestry, and they were aged 54 on average when the study began.

Participants were given a score ranging from 0 to 14, depending on how well they adhered to all seven health factors.

Researchers also calculated their genetic risk scores, depending on whether they had variants linked to a higher or lower risk of Alzheimer’s disease.

By the end of the study, 1603 people with European ancestry and 631 people with African ancestry had developed dementia. Across all five genetic risk groups, those with the highest scores on lifestyle factors were more than 40% less likely to develop dementia.

Overall, in the European ancestry group, those with the highest lifestyle scores were 43% less likely to develop dementia than those with the lowest scores. Among the African ancestry group, people with the highest lifestyle scores had a 17% lower risk than those with the lowest scores.

Dr Rosa Sancho, head of research for Alzheimer’s Research UK, said: “This study supports the idea that what is good for the heart is also good for the brain. We will need further studies to assess how good heart health affects dementia risk in the wider population, with sufficient people from ethnically diverse backgrounds.”