Brain health for life

Understanding and managing dementia risks

dementia understand together

DSiDC
Dementia Services Information and Development Centre

Brain health for life

Understanding and managing dementia risks

Spotify codes

This booklet is a bit unusual because it uses Spotify music codes along with each of the risk factors. This is partly for fun and partly to help you remember the risk factors that can cause dementia.

If you'd like to use the Spotify music codes, here's what to do:

1. If you don't have the Spotify app, first download it from the App Store or Google Play. Open the Spotify app on your smartphone.
2. Tap the Search icon and then a new screen will open with a search bar at the top. Next to the search bar, you'll see a camera icon.
3. Tap the camera icon and point your phone camera at the Spotify music code. At this point you may be asked to allow Spotify to access your camera. You will have to allow access to continue.
4. You'll be sent straight to the song. Press Play to listen.

This will work on both the paid and free Spotify service.

Dementia affects memory, thinking, and the ability to perform everyday activities. It is not a normal part of getting older.

Age is the biggest risk factor for dementia but it is not the only one. While we can't stop getting older, there are other risk factors for dementia that we can do something about.

In fact, research shows that up to 45% of dementia cases could be prevented or delayed by focusing on the main risk factors as we go through life.

This booklet explains the 14 risk factors identified by leading health experts. It also offers practical steps to help you reduce your risk of developing dementia.

The Korgis
Everybody's Got To Learn Sometime

1 Low education

RISK

Fewer years of formal education is linked with a higher risk of dementia.

What you can do:

- Engage in lifelong learning through courses, reading or learning something new every day.
- Learn new skills such as playing a musical instrument, craftwork or gardening.

For information about adult education, go to: www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/further-education-and-training/returning-to-education/

2 Hearing loss

RISK

Hearing loss can lead to social isolation and cognitive decline.

Low
When I go Deaf

What you can do:

- Get regular hearing checks.
- Use hearing aids if they are recommended.
- Ask your GP to make sure there is no build-up of earwax. If so, ask for advice to clear it.
- Check your hearing in an audiology or hearing service.

For advice on how to get your hearing checked, go to: www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/health-services/dental-aural-and-optical-services/hearing-and-ear-health/#00c470

3 Traumatic brain injury

RISK

Head injuries increase the risk of getting dementia.

The Primitives
Crash

What you can do:

- Always protect your head. Wear a helmet when cycling or on a scooter.
- If you play soccer, avoid hitting the ball with your head.
- Take care to prevent falls – especially in icy weather.
- Wear a seatbelt in vehicles.

For advice on head injuries and concussion, go to:
www2.hse.ie/conditions/head-injury-concussion

The Clash
Pressure Drop

4 High blood pressure

RISK

High blood pressure (hypertension) damages blood vessels, including those in the brain.

What you can do:

- Ask your GP or local pharmacist to check your blood pressure is within healthy levels. Blood pressure should be checked at least once a year.
- Reduce salt from your regular diet, and try to eat a healthy heart diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- If you have tablets for your blood pressure, take them exactly as the GP prescribes.

For more information about high blood pressure, go to: www.irishheart.ie

5 Drinking excessive alcohol

RISK

Drinking too much alcohol damages brain cells.

Dax
Dear Alcohol

What you can do:

- If you choose to drink, drink alcohol in moderation and follow the guidelines:
  - Men should not have more than 17 standard drinks in a week.
  - Women should not have more than 11 standard drinks in a week.
  - You should always have 2 or 3 days a week completely alcohol free.

One standard drink is:

- a pub measure of spirits (35.5ml)
- a small glass of wine (12.5% volume)
- a half pint of normal beer (4 – 6% volume)

A bottle of 12.5% wine has about 7 standard drinks or 7 small glasses.

- If you have a problem with controlling your drinking, talk to your GP for advice.

For more information about drinking alcohol, go to: www.drinkaware.ie

6 Obesity

RISK

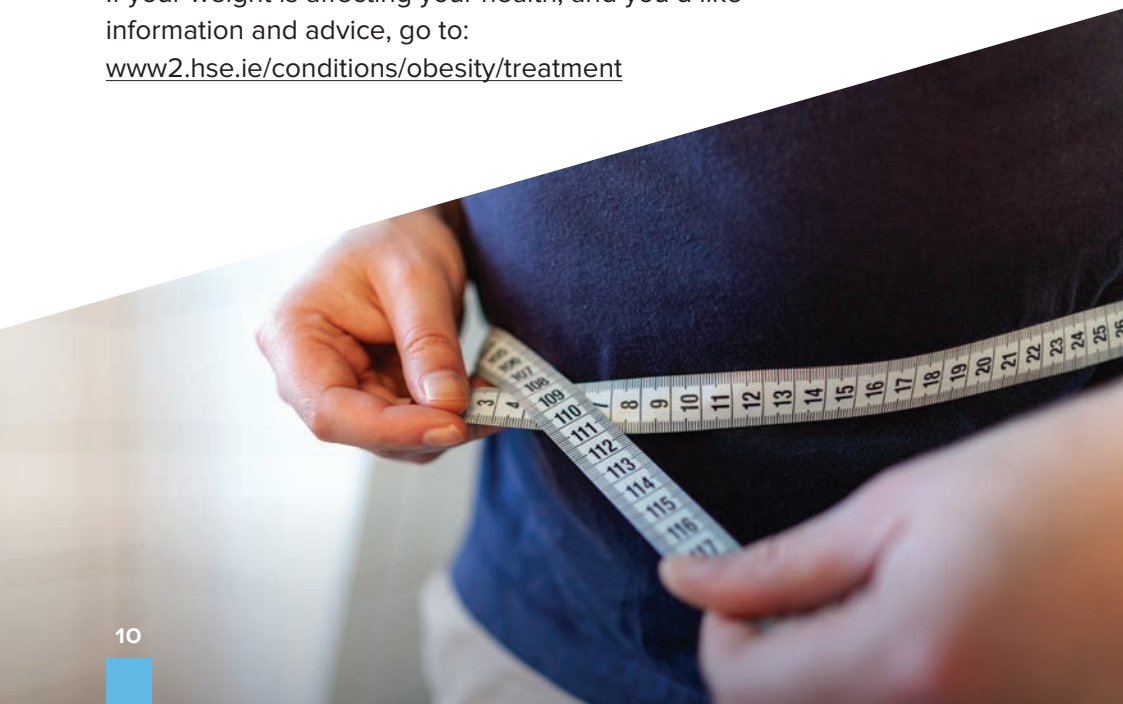
Increases the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

Gregory Isaacs
Losing Weight

What you can do:

- Maintain a healthy weight through a balanced diet and regular physical activity.
- Measure your waist. If your waist is over a certain size, you have a higher risk of health problems associated with obesity:
  - Men with a waist circumference greater than 102 cm (40 inches)
  - Women with a waist circumference greater than 88 cm (35 inches)

If your weight is affecting your health, and you'd like information and advice, go to:
www2.hse.ie/conditions/obesity/treatment



7 Smoking

RISK

Smoking damages blood vessels and can cause inflammation of brain tissue.

What you can do:

- Quit smoking at any age.
- Seek support or information on cessation programmes from your GP.

Go to the Quit Smoking page of the HSE website for advice and help:
www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking

Lambchop
Cigarettiquette

Rosie Carney
Black Star

8 Depression

RISK

Chronic (long-term) depression is associated with cognitive decline.

What you can do:

- Seek professional help. Your GP can advise you and recommend therapy, medication, and support groups for further help.

For advice and information, go to the Aware website: www.aware.ie

9 Social isolation

RISK

Loneliness contributes to cognitive decline.

Joy Division
Isolation

What you can do:

- Stay connected with family, friends and your community.
- Join a club, volunteer, engage in new activities to remain connected with others.
- Social prescribing is a free public service which will help you connect with community initiatives to improve your health and wellbeing. Ask your GP about your nearest social prescribing service.

For advice on how to deal with loneliness, go to:
www2.hse.ie/mental-health/life-situations-events/loneliness/coping-with/

10 Physical inactivity

Parquet Courts
Wide Awake

RISK

Not being physically active is linked to poorer brain health.

What you can do:

- Increase your physical activity. Walk more and sit less. Join an exercise class or an organisation such as Parkrun.
- Set a goal. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. This is about half an hour a day for five days a week.
  - The exercise should make your heart rate increase from its usual level. If this level of exercise is too much for you, do a smaller amount and try to build it up.

For more information on physical activity go to:
www2.hse.ie/living-well/exercise/

11 Air pollution

RISK

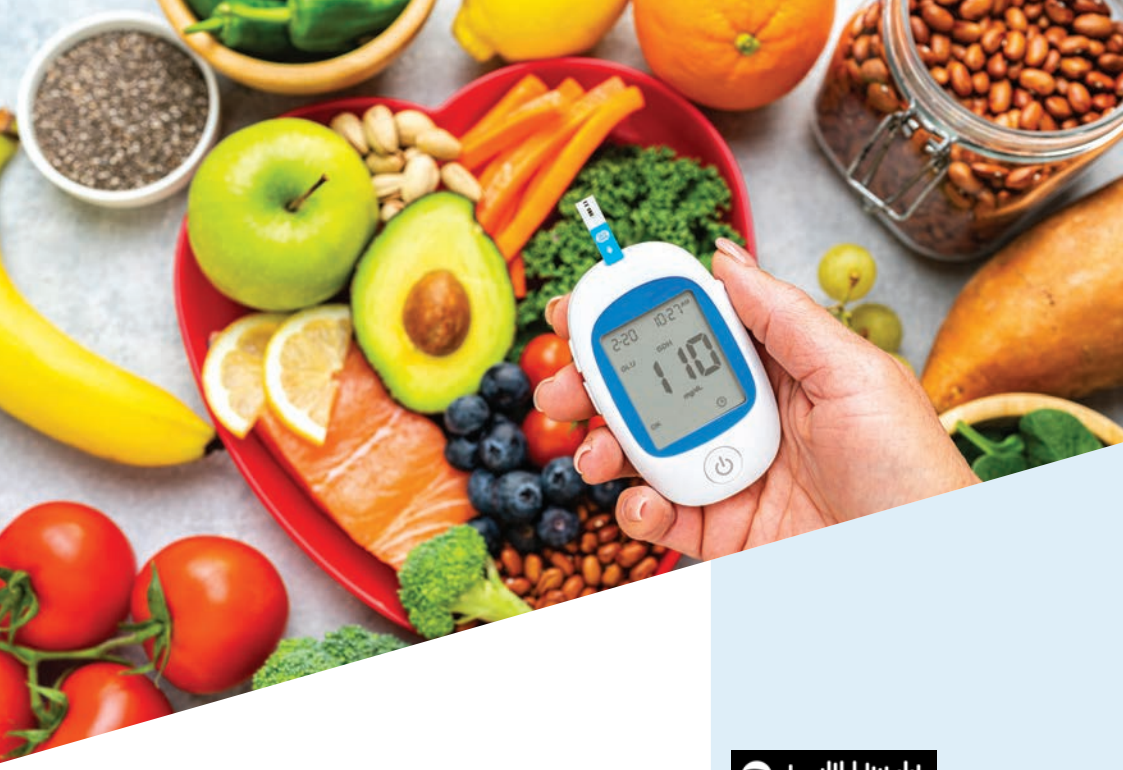
Air pollution may speed up brain ageing and can cause heart and blood vessel disease and stroke.

Joni Mitchell
Big Yellow Taxi

What you can do:

- Reduce exposure by using air purifiers, avoiding heavy traffic areas and supporting clean air policies.
- Try to spend as much time as you can in open areas with green spaces and away from cities and traffic.

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) website has useful information on how to improve your air quality: www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/air/



12 Diabetes

RISK

Poorly managed diabetes can damage blood vessels in the brain.

What you can do:

- See your GP to have a blood test to ensure that your blood sugar levels are within the recommended limits. An annual blood test is recommended for most people in good health.
- If you are diagnosed with diabetes or pre-diabetes, a healthy diet, exercise and medication can reduce your blood sugar levels.

For more information, go to the Diabetes Ireland website at: www.diabetes.ie/

Talking Heads
Sugar on My Tongue

13 Untreated vision loss

Velvet Underground
Beginning to See
the Light

RISK

Poor vision leads to a decrease in cognitive function.

What you can do:

- Get an eye test at least every two years as your eyesight can change as you get older.
- Wear glasses or contact lenses if you need them.

For advice on poor vision, go to the Vision Ireland website at:
www.vi.ie/

14 High LDL cholesterol levels

RISK

High cholesterol is linked with narrowing of the blood vessels, poor blood circulation and absorption of nutrients and death of brain cells.

What you can do:

- Get your cholesterol levels checked regularly by your GP.
- Eat a healthy low-fat diet.
- If you have been prescribed medicine to manage your cholesterol levels, remember to take it regularly.

For more information on cholesterol, go to: www.irishheart.ie/how-to-keep-your-heart-healthy/cholesterol/

Tom Waits
Eggs and Sausage
(In a Cadillac with
Susan Michelson)

Making positive changes

By making changes to our lifestyles around the 14 risk factors in this booklet, we may be able to reduce our risk of developing dementia.

The other good news is that taking these practical steps will also reduce our risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer!

Other steps we can take towards a happier, healthier life include:

- Using relaxation techniques and mindfulness to reduce stress
- Eating a Mediterranean-style diet
- Having a regular sleep schedule

More information and support about dementia

- The Dementia Services Information and Development Centre (DSiDC) provides education, training and information on dementia care – www.dementia.ie
- Dementia Understand Together provides information, training and more – www.understandtogether.ie
- HSE Live freephone: 1800 700 700 or 01 240 8787
- Alzheimer Society of Ireland, freephone helpline: 1800 341 341 or www.alzheimer.ie

DSiDC
Dementia Services Information and Development Centre

dementia understand together

Dementia Services Information and Development Centre
6th Floor, Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing
St James's Hospital, James's Street
Dublin 8, D08 E9P6
Tel: 01 416 2035

www.dementia.ie

Clarity
Approved by Plain English Ireland