

How Your Work Can Reduce Your Dementia Risk

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Dementia is one of the most prevalent diseases among older adults. Recent research suggests that intellectually demanding work is associated with a lower risk of developing dementia.

What is Dementia?

Dementias are age-related diseases that involve persistent troubles with memory as well as difficulties with planning and problem solving, and completing ordinary daily tasks. A sign of the onset of dementia is the steady decline of those abilities.

Causes of dementia are connected to the aging of the brain. The most prevalent causes include Alzheimer's disease, Lewy body disease, cerebrovascular disease, and other disorders. However, dementia risk is also influenced by lifestyle factors, lack of physical activity, smoking, eating an unhealthy diet, and not engaging in mentally challenging activities.¹



• **Complexity.**

Individuals who engage in complex tasks involving data or people are less likely to develop dementia later in life.¹³⁻¹⁷

For instance, synthesizing or coordinating data is associated with a more than 30% reduced dementia risk compared to computing data. Mentoring people or negotiating with people is associated with a more than 20% reduced dementia risk compared to supervising people.¹³⁻¹⁷ The reduction in dementia risk tends to be greater for less-educated individuals¹³ and for those working longer with high complexity activities.¹⁴



What Work Reduces Dementia Risk?

Mentally demanding work can help reduce dementia risk. Results from recent population-based longitudinal studies and twin studies have increased the understanding of how work is associated with a lower risk of dementia. Taking into account the effect of education and health status, these findings suggest that certain intellectual demands at work can be a resource against dementia:

• **Intellectually stimulating.** Working in jobs that are intellectually stimulating could promote better cognitive functioning in old age²⁻⁵ and lower the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease⁶ or any form of dementia.⁷



• **High job control.** Having flexibility in making decisions about how to structure your work and what tasks to perform is connected with better cognitive functioning after retirement⁸⁻¹⁰ and lower dementia risk.¹¹⁻¹²



• **Use of executive cognitive functions.**

Work that requires the active use of logical reasoning, planning, and problem solving could lower dementia risk.^{13, 18-21} Research shows a more than 10% reduced dementia risk for those who engage in high levels of analyzing¹³, reasoning¹⁸, and mathematics.^{18, 21} An increase from 'moderate' to 'high' use of executive cognitive functions was associated with a 10-15% lower dementia risk.^{19, 21}



How Demanding is Too Much?

Highly demanding work can only be an effective resource against dementia if it is not stressful. Chronic stress could impair cognitive functioning²² and even cause harmful changes to the brain.^{23, 24} In order to avoid unnecessary stress, workers must be trained to deal with challenging work^{25, 26} and factors such as time pressure, frequent interruptions, or excessive multitasking must be alleviated.²⁷

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