

June 2018

## Cause

1. A recent study from Japan looks at how people with Alzheimer's cover up memory gaps and continue to be able to communicate rather than appearing cognitively impaired, in the earlier stages of the disease. A selection of outpatients, with varying forms of dementia, were given a mini mental status test and their "Saving Appearance Responses/Behaviours" (SARs) were recorded. Simply put, SARs are the "act of pretending to know answers to keep up appearances". The researchers found that the participants with Alzheimer's were 3.5 times more likely to employ SARs than people with mild cognitive impairment, and 4.2 times more likely than people with Lewy Bodies dementia. The researchers suggest that their findings show that empathy and insight are maintained in early Alzheimer's, blending memory and our "social instincts".

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[Read more HERE for the types of SARs employed](#)

2. According to a new study, the 3-minute Visual Association Test (VAT) is a reliable tool for assessing dementia risk in people with a small decline in the MMSE (Mini Mental Status Examination). Participants, aged between 70 and 78 years, took part in the *Prevention of Dementia by Intensive Vascular Care* trial, which showed that a reduction in a MMSE score points over a 2 year period, combined with an imperfect VAT score, was associated with an increased risk of developing dementia. The researchers concluded that the VAT can "help distinguish those at increased risk of developing dementia....from those in whom watchful waiting is justified."

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3. Researchers in Rome, working with MRI technology, have found that it is possible to detect early signs of neurological damage in people with high blood pressure before any symptoms of dementia occur. Hypertensive patients showed significant deterioration of the white matter fibres connecting brain areas typically involved in attention, emotions and memory. These patients did not show clinical signs of dementia and no cerebral damage was visible.

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4. Changes in a person's gait can indicate cognitive impairment. A collaboration between doctors and an Osaka systems development firm has led to the development of an app that can detect these possible signs of dementia. The *iTUG* app is designed to measure the speed of a person's movements (backwards and forwards, up and down, left to right) as they walk, and produces a score out of 100 indicating the level of impairment. Previously, healthcare workers would manually measure impairment by timing how long a person took to stand, walk 3 metres, turn around and return to their seat (known as the "TUG" - Time Up and Go - Test).

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5. Two new studies suggest herpes could play a role in causing Alzheimer's disease (AD). One study shows high concentrations of the herpesvirus in the brains of people with AD, whilst the other reports herpes appears to activate the growth of amyloid plaques. The strains of herpes implicated are not sexually transmitted, nor are they the type that cause cold sores. The virus is extremely common and almost impossible to avoid, with around 90% of people being infected during their life time. Further research needs to be conducted to determine whether the virus makes one more susceptible to AD or visa versa.

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## Cure

1. A medication normally used for the treatment of asthma may prove to be successful in also treating dementia, a new study claims. Researchers from Temple University found that, in tests on mice engineered to have Alzheimer's disease, the drug *Zileuton* removed toxic proteins in the brain, as well as appearing to improve memory. Mice that were not given the drug had severely damaged synapses and declining cognitive function.

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2. Researchers in Massachusetts, conducting experiments with cells from people with dementia, have found a way to render the APOE4 gene harmless. APOE4 causes amyloid beta proteins to accumulate in the brain, and is the most significant risk gene for late-onset Alzheimer's. Using a genetic "snipping" technique, the scientists are able to turn the gene into an APOE3, which is considered a "healthy" gene. Though it is not known exactly why APOE4 causes the build-up of amyloid, the researchers are hopeful this type of gene editing could lead to the successful reversal of Alzheimer's.

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## Care

1. A pilot program focusing on the needs of Aboriginal people in remote areas is aiming to keep them safe whilst enabling them to remain on their traditional country. Studies have shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are up to five times more likely to develop dementia than the rest of the population. Stigma and misunderstanding about the disease can put people at risk or force them into aged care facilities that do not cater to their specific needs and isolate them from their community. A care centre in Bidyadanga is making a difference to Aboriginal people with dementia by reinforcing their sense of self through traditional art (decorating the centre), individual music playlists and person-centred care plans. Local women are on hand to care for the people and provide them with companionship and connection to the community.

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2. UK supermarket chain, Sainsbury's, are introducing "relaxed" checkout lanes to enable people with dementia to shop at their leisure, without the stress of being rushed through a typical shopping lane. Successfully trialled in Newcastle, the program will be rolled out across the UK, with staff at select stores receiving special training to help them assist people who are cognitively impaired.

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