

## July 2018 Research Report

### Cause

1. Researchers from the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre say sleep apnoea may be a major risk factor for dementia. Obstructive sleep apnoea occurs when muscles in the throat relax, causing the airway to block which results in lower levels of oxygen in the blood. This "oxygen desaturation", the researchers say, is likely to contribute to cognitive decline and, as sleep apnoea is very common in people over 65, treating it could delay or even prevent the onset of dementia.

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2. Women who have had five or more babies are as much as 70% more at risk of developing Alzheimer's, according to a new study from the Seoul National University. Women who have not been pregnant or had had an incomplete pregnancy scored much higher on cognitive and memory tests. Hormones, produced during pregnancy and over a woman's lifetime, may be a factor in increasing Alzheimer's risk. Researchers say the slight increase in oestrogen during the first trimester of pregnancy is within the optimal range for protecting brain function, but in subsequent months (as the pregnancy progresses) oestrogen levels continue to climb, and researchers believe this may, in some way, have a detrimental effect on the brain.

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### Cure

1. Vitamin D has previously been reported to have possible brain-protecting benefits, but a recent study from scientists at the University of Adelaide has shown it is very unlikely to protect people from diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis. The researchers suggest that lower levels of vitamin are not indicative of higher risk of neurological disease but, rather, that the link is associative. However, the team found evidence that UV light could benefit the brain in other ways, separate to levels of vitamin D.

<https://psychcentral.com/news/2018/07/11/vitamin-d-may-not-protect-from-dementia-alzheimers-after-all/136884.html>

2. Scientists in the UK believe anti-viral medications, used to treat herpes, may have significant effect on dementia risk. A diagnosis of the herpes simplex virus is associated with a higher risk of dementia, but the new data shows that, with aggressive antiviral treatment, the risk could be reduced tenfold, and appeared to prevent the long-term brain damage usually seen in Alzheimer's disease.

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3. New research by the University of Edinburgh shows how a disease, called Cerebral Small Vessel Disease (CSVD), contributes to dementia and stroke. By studying the molecular features of the disease in rats, the scientists were able to identify how CSVD damages the myelin covering of nerve fibres that transmit signals between brain cells. Abnormalities in nerve fibres and their myelin covering are common in the brains of people with dementia. The researchers also found that the rats with CSVD had dysfunctional epithelial cells, and that by using drugs that stabilise these cells, they could reverse the abnormalities in the early stages of the disease. Further research is required to ascertain if similar results could be possible once the disease has established itself and, if so, if it would be possible to reverse dementia.

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## Care

1. Researchers from the University of Canberra are working with an art program at the National Gallery of Australia to find out if is effective at improving the quality of life for people living with dementia. The researchers will track cortisol in participants' saliva, giving an indication of their stress levels, and will also look at various markers of inflammation in the body, which is associated with poorer cognitive performance in people with dementia.

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/can-art-improve-the-lives-of-people-with-dementia-20180705-p4zpqo.html>

## Alzheimer's WA Supported Research

A multidisciplinary national and international team, coordinated from CQ University, has been funded through the Australian Government Department of Health Dementia and Aged Care Services Fund to evaluate feasibility, acceptability and effectiveness of video conferencing to connect carers with other carers. While this technology has been tested with people with chronic disease, connecting carers is a new and promising innovation. The Caring for Carers Program has been developed using a co-design approach, capturing the shared experiences and unmet needs of informal carers of people with dementia, to underpin the content of the program.

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# Research Report

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the dementia experts