

December 2019

1. Waist circumference in later life and its links to dementia risk are the subject of a large-scale study from Korea. Researchers examined over 800,000 participants, aged 65 years and over, and followed them from 2009 to 2015, or until they developed dementia. Taking into account any underlying conditions that might influence BMI (Body Mass Index) the study revealed that people whose waist circumference was equal to or higher than 90cm for men and 85cm for women significantly raised their risk of dementia. As this study was limited to an Asian population, further international investigation is warranted to ascertain if the findings are true of other populations.

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2. Speech-analysing technology via a smartphone app is being developed by engineers at UNSW Sydney to help reduce time spent diagnosing dementia. The app will look at paralinguistic features of a person's speech, such as pitch, volume and intonation, as well as assessing their memory recall. Tell-tale signs of dementia including frequent pauses when searching for a word, repeated phrases, extended syllables and fillers such as "um" will be identified and assessed by the app, enabling it to discriminate between participants at low and high risk of developing dementia, with an accuracy of up to 97%.

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3. According to new research from the U.S., olive oil has been shown to protect the brain against Alzheimer's disease in mice. Engineered to develop dementia, the mice were fed a diet containing extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) and, after six months, experienced a 60% reduction in toxic tau build-up, compared with mice not consuming EVOO. Brain tissue appeared normal and the usual typical features of cognitive decline, such as amyloid plaques, were not visible.

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4. A recently published article looks at literary fiction, and how it can help nursing staff to understand and empathise with people living with dementia. Novels such as "Still Alice" by Lisa Genova, and Jonathan Franzen's "The Corrections", gives readers an insight in the lives and experiences of someone living with dementia, in an accessible format. Fictional narratives can also be used to facilitate clinical supervision and group support, helping nurses to explore their feelings and encourage an understanding of dementia.

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5. Statins may not pose a dementia risk, as previously claimed by some studies. Instead, research by scientists at the Garvan Institute says the cholesterol-lowering medications may even protect people who are at risk from developing dementia. The study looked at 1'037 community-dwelling people aged between 70 and 90 years. Cognition and memory were tested over six years, and brain volume measured via MRI scans. No differences in the rate of decline in memory or global cognition between statin users and never-users was evidenced.

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6. A seaweed-based drug, *Oligommanate*, has been conditionally approved in China for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. The drug will go on sale whilst additional clinical trials are ongoing; it will be strictly monitored and, if any dangerous side effects or other concerns become apparent, it will be withdrawn. The scientists behind Oligommanate initially investigated the possible benefits of seaweed as people who consume it regularly were found to have lower incidences of Alzheimer's. The team claim a sugar contained within seaweed suppresses certain bacteria contained in the gut which can cause neural degeneration and inflammation of the brain, leading to Alzheimer's. It is hoped the drug will soon be trialled internationally.

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7. Findings from new research suggests that dementia risk is increased for people who are illiterate. Researchers believe the link is related to the lack of brain-engaging activities like reading newspapers, helping children with homework and problem-solving, which improve neuroplasticity. Taking into account age, socioeconomic background and cardiovascular health, participants in the study were two to three times more likely to develop dementia if they were illiterate.

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8. A project team from The University of Newcastle has created a new guide to assist general practitioners and primary care staff working with people living with dementia. "People with Dementia: a Care Guide for General Practice" contains flow charts to illustrate pathways of care and provides information on six priority topics, including "Dementia in People with an Intellectual Disability" and "Communication: Diagnoses and Consultations."

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9. Findings from a new study (“Insight 46”) suggest that vascular risk factors in early adulthood may be associated with cognitive impairment in later life, even more than midlife factors. Over 500 participants have taken part in the study, led by researchers from the Queen Square Institute of Neurology, London. Higher vascular risk scores were associated with smaller brain volume and higher white matter-hyperintensity volume, with early adulthood risk seeming to be more closely linked.

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