

THESE FEW THINGS MAY HELP STAVE OFF DEMENTIA, SCIENTISTS SAY



Scientists think there may be a few things you can do to keep dementia at bay: train your brain, keep your blood pressure under control and stay active.

According to a report published Thursday by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), there is promising evidence that cognitive training, managing your blood pressure if you have hypertension and increasing your physical activity may help prevent age-related cognitive decline and dementia.

The report's findings line up with the Alzheimer's Association's findings from two years ago, said Keith N. Fargo, the association's director of Scientific Programs and Outreach. In 2015, the organization published its own review and identified two things that could help minimize the risk of cognitive decline.

"They were increasing physical activity and improving cardiovascular health," he said.

"The ideas were there before the report," said Dan G. Blazer, a member of the NASEM committee that conducted the study and the J.P. Gibbons Professor of Psychiatry Emeritus at Duke University Medical Center. "What is good for the heart is good for the brain. Therefore, exercise and controlling high blood pressure are good for the brain."

And cognitive training is getting a lot of attention now, said Blazer. Cognitive training refers to programs or exercises aimed at improving reasoning, problem-solving, memory and processing speed. Sometimes they can be computer-based.

In one randomized control trial of 2,832 participants that the committee reviewed called the Advanced Cognitive Training for Independent and Vital Elderly (ACTIVE) trial, those who had received cognitive training in reasoning and speed-of-processing showed less decline in those areas than those who didn't — after ten years.

"(Cognitive training) is an area worthy of looking forward," said Blazer.

The evidence is encouraging, but not enough to embark on a public health campaign, said Alan I. Leshner, the chair of the NASEM committee and CEO Emeritus of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In the report, the findings were described as "encouraging, but inconclusive" evidence.

Further research needs to be done, the report added.

Even so, Fargo of the Alzheimer's Association said the public should understand one thing.

"There are things that you can do to reduce your risk," he said.

"You can take your own cognitive health and brain health in your hands," he said. "You can affect it in a positive way."

Sources: Sarah Toy, USA Today