

# Diabetes, heart disease, smoking increase risk of death for older adults with dementia

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Dementia (a decline in memory and other mental abilities) is a serious condition, and its prognosis (the likely course of the disease) is marked by progressive loss of cognitive function and complications such as infections and falls. Dementia has no cure, and is increasingly a cause of death in the United States. Heart disease and diabetes, which affect blood vessels and circulation, have similar risk factors to dementia, so it's important for healthcare professionals to understand links between these conditions.

In new research published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, researchers reviewed 12 studies that included more than 235,000 people with [dementia](#). They learned that older adults with dementia and diabetes have a significantly higher risk for death (called a "mortality risk") than do people with just dementia. People with dementia who smoked tobacco were also at a much higher risk for death, and those with dementia who had coronary [heart disease](#) had a somewhat higher risk for death. In addition, the researchers learned that men who had dementia had a worse forecast for the likely course of their disease than did women.

On the other hand, having high blood pressure, being overweight, and having high cholesterol did not seem to increase the risk for death for [older adults](#) with dementia.

The researchers said that their findings raise questions about how to treat [high cholesterol](#) and [high blood pressure](#) in older people with dementia, since those conditions don't seem to be linked to a higher risk for death. Decisions about treating people with dementia for those conditions should be based on an older person's preferences and whether the treatment will improve quality of life, while also weighing the risks and benefits of treatment, noted the researchers.

**More information:** Irene E. van de Vorst et al. Effect of Vascular Risk Factors and Diseases on

Mortality in Individuals with Dementia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.13835](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.13835)

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