

Study examines unsafe behaviors in older adults who likely have dementia

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[Dementia](#) currently affects some 5 million people in the U.S., and that number is expected to triple by 2050. Having dementia affects the way you think, act, and make decisions.

In a study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, researchers examined how often older adults who have diagnosed and undiagnosed dementia engage in potentially unsafe activities.

The researchers examined 7,609 Medicare beneficiaries aged 65 to more than 90-years-old. Based on various cognitive tests, the researchers determined that 1,038 of the people they observed had probable dementia. Of that group, 457 had been diagnosed with dementia and 581 had not been diagnosed with dementia.

Nearly 1,000 participants tested as having "possible" dementia and 5,575 did not have dementia.

Of the older adults with probable dementia, the researchers learned that:

- 23 percent were still driving
- 31 percent prepared hot meals
- 22 percent managed their own finances
- 37 percent managed their own medications
- 21 percent attended doctors' appointments alone

The researchers said that people with probable dementia who had not been diagnosed were more likely to engage in potentially dangerous activities than people who had been diagnosed with dementia. They also suggest that healthcare practitioners could better address safety concerns for people with dementia if they ask older adults about the kinds of potentially unsafe activities they perform.

"Families of older adults with dementia are the best

people to recognize when an activity is becoming unsafe, and should bring any concerns to their healthcare providers," said Halima Amjad, MD, MPH, study co-author and post-doctoral fellow, Division of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore.

"Families can also help recognize undiagnosed dementia by reporting any changes in memory or thinking abilities in their loved one, or if they're having more difficulty performing their activities," added Dr. Amjad.

More information: Halima Amjad et al, Potentially Unsafe Activities and Living Conditions of Older Adults with Dementia, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.14164](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.14164)

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