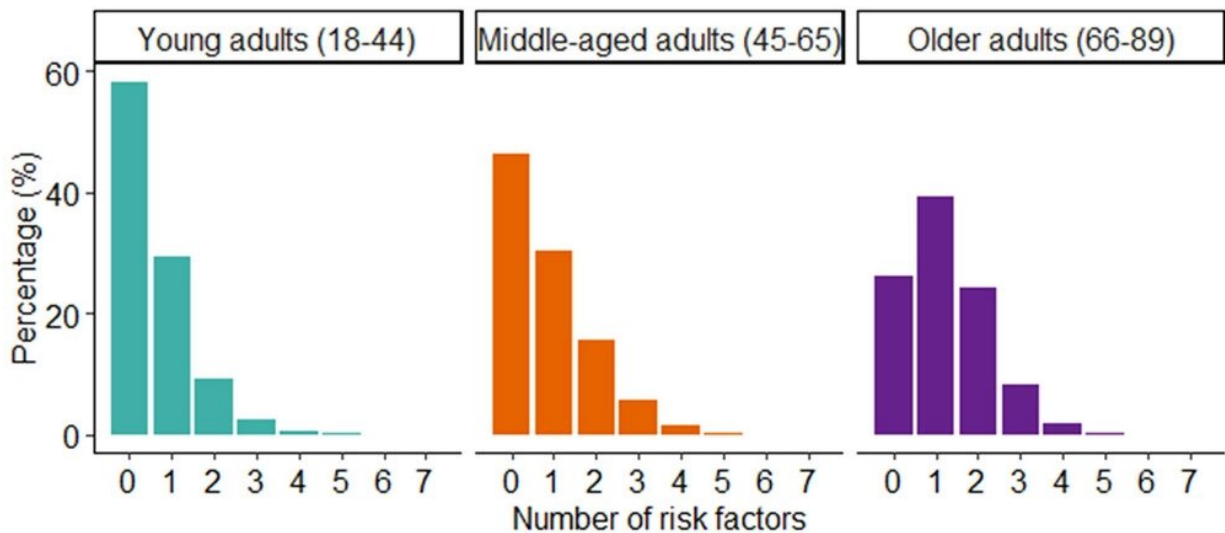


# Lifestyle may be more important than age in determining dementia risk: Study

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Prevalence (% frequency) of number of risk factors per age period. Credit: *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring* (2022). DOI: 10.1002/dad2.12337

Individuals with no dementia risk factors, such as smoking, diabetes or hearing loss, have similar brain health as people who are 10 to 20 years younger than them, according to a new Baycrest study. The study found that a single dementia risk factor could reduce cognition by the equivalent of up to three years of aging.

"Our results suggest [lifestyle factors](#) may be more important than age in

determining someone's level of cognitive functioning. This is great news, since there's a lot you can do to modify these factors, such as managing diabetes, addressing hearing loss, and getting the support you need to quit smoking," says Dr. Annalise LaPlume, Postdoctoral Fellow at Baycrest's Rotman Research Institute (RRI) and the study's lead author.

The study is one of the first to look at lifestyle [risk factors](#) for dementia across the entire lifespan.

"While most studies of this nature look at mid- and older-adulthood, we also included data from participants as young as 18, and we found that risk factors had a negative impact on [cognitive performance](#) across all ages. This is crucial as it means risk factors can and should be addressed as early as possible," says Dr. Nicole Anderson, Senior Scientist at the RRI, Associate Scientific Director of Baycrest's Kimel Family Center for Brain Health and Wellness, and senior author of this study.

The study, published today in the journal *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment, and Disease Monitoring*, a journal of the Alzheimer's Association, included data from 22,117 people aged 18 to 89 who completed the Cogniciti Brain Health Assessment, developed by Baycrest. Participants took the test in their own homes by going to the Cogniciti website. The test takes around 20 minutes to complete and consists of a background questionnaire and four cognitive tasks.

The researchers looked at participants' performance on memory and attention tests, and how this was impacted by eight modifiable risk factors for dementia: low education (less than a [high school diploma](#)), hearing loss, [traumatic brain injury](#), alcohol or [substance abuse](#), hypertension, smoking (currently or in the past four years), diabetes and depression.

Each factor led to a decrease in cognitive performance by as much as

three years of aging, with each additional factor contributing the same amount of decline. For example, having three risk factors could lead to a decrease in cognitive performance equivalent to as much as nine years of aging. The effects of the risk factors increased with age, as did the number of risk factors people had.

"All in all, our research shows that you have the power to decrease your risk of cognitive decline and dementia," says Dr. LaPlume. "Start addressing any risk factors you have now, whether you're 18 or 90, and you'll support your brain health to help yourself age fearlessly."

The researchers are considering looking further into the differences between normal agers and "super agers"—people who have identical cognitive performance to those several decades younger than them.

**More information:** Annalise A. LaPlume et al, The adverse effect of modifiable dementia risk factors on cognition amplifies across the adult lifespan, *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/dad2.12337](https://doi.org/10.1002/dad2.12337)

Provided by Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care

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