

Research in the News

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1. New research, led by the University of Exeter, is focusing on a common, but under-researched, symptom of dementia: apathy. Often confused with depression, apathy is the most common neuropsychiatric symptom of dementia, and leads to the person withdrawing from activities and social interaction. It can have significant impact on quality of life for both the person living with dementia, and their families. It can accelerate cognitive decline and people with apathy have a higher mortality rate. The researchers hope to use their findings to improve personalised care, activity programs, and other interventions for people with dementia, for whom apathy is a concern.
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2. A personalised music therapy program for people living with dementia is helping Geraldton residents. The Rotary Club of Geraldton-Greenough began providing personalised headsets in December and has since ordered 400 units – one for every member of the community who has been diagnosed with dementia. The headsets, loaded with playlists of the recipient's favourite music prompt their user to interact and have conversations, where they may usually be non-communicative. Caregivers found that their loved ones were calmer and less agitated, and that they have been interacting positively with others. A reduction in the use of anti-psychotics has also been reported. By collaborating directly with an electronics supplier, the Rotary Club has been able to keep the cost of the headsets low (approx. \$40 per set); they are also easy to use, even for people with reduced mobility.
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3. A new program in the U.K provides caregivers of people living with dementia with coping strategies and therapy to help improve their mental health. The START (STrategies for RelaTives) program is delivered by psychology students, and helps caregivers to manage their own well-being now and into the future. A study from the University College London has found the program significantly reduces the risk of anxiety depression in caregivers, and is both cost-effective and easily implemented in different settings.
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4. Women who stay in the workforce longer, have less risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, according to a long-term study of ageing people in the U.S. The study of over 6,000 women found that those who held paid jobs between the ages of 16 and 50 had better memories later in life, than their peers who did not work. Women who had never worked had the fastest rate of cognitive deterioration. The researchers believe it is the social interaction that comes with working that is most beneficial in reducing risk of dementia.
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5. Genetics are known to play a part in the risk of developing dementia, but scientists now say it is possible to reduce your risk even if you have a family history of the disease. A large study from the U.S. has found that people with high genetic risk and poor health habits were three times as likely to develop dementia versus those with low genetic risk and good habits. The researchers also noted it was important that people adopted healthy habits early on to reduce their risk even further.
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6. Depression, stress, PTSD, loneliness, lack of social interaction, and other mental health concerns may be contributing to the higher rates of cognitive decline in LGBTQ adults. A study, led by the University of California, San Francisco, found that more than 14% of LGBTQ participants aged 45 and above reported worsening or frequent confusion over a 12-month period, as opposed to 10% of their straight, cisgender peers. The researchers stress that their findings do not suggest a definite link with dementia, or the risk of developing it, it does indicate that more needs to be done to support LGBTQ individuals to combat cognitive decline and reduced quality of life.
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7. Research from China suggests a link between consumption of chili peppers and an increased risk of cognitive decline. While eating chili is generally associated with lower mortality rates, and is considered beneficial to healthy blood pressure and body weight maintenance, the new study found that people who consumed 50g or more of chili per day had double the risk of cognitive decline than their peers who ate less. The study looked at both dried and fresh chili, but did not include sweet capsicum or black peppers. Levels of education were also thought to play an important part in the overall risk of dementia.
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