

Healthy Lifestyle Could Reduce Alzheimer's Risk

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - Regular exercise and a healthy diet could go a long way to reducing the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, a medical expert said on Thursday.

A recent Finnish study showed that middle-aged people taking regular exercise at least twice a week could reduce their risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by 50 percent in old age, neurologist Miia Kivipelto said at a conference in Amsterdam.

"An active lifestyle, both physical, mental and social, is preventive. It's never too early to start to prevent Alzheimer's disease," said Kivipelto, an Alzheimer's disease specialist at Stockholm's Gerontology Research Center.

An estimated 12 million people worldwide suffer from Alzheimer's, which is the leading cause of dementia in the elderly. There is no cure for a condition which robs people of their memory and mental ability but drugs have been approved to alleviate symptoms.

Studies have shown that people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity could be running a greater risk of developing Alzheimer's and dementia than those with a more active, healthy lifestyle, she said.

People could reduce the risk of developing the disease by going to their doctor for regular check-ups to monitor their blood pressure, cholesterol and weight, she said on the sidelines of a conference on old age organized by Britain's Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Other recent studies show that elderly people who take regular walks are less likely to suffer from dementia. Mental activities such as reading and doing crossword puzzles also help to slow mental decline.