

Alzheimer's – The New Treatment Landscape

Explore evidence-based habits that can support brain health in your 30s and learn what researchers are uncovering about Alzheimer's risk and prevention.

Let's Talk Brain Health

Women in their 30s are often juggling careers, caregiving, and relationships — all while navigating big decisions about their health and future. For some, Alzheimer's might feel like a distant worry. For others, it's deeply personal — shaped by seeing a loved one struggle with the disease or providing care themselves. That familiarity can bring fear, but also powerful motivation. Even for those who aren't thinking about it yet, the habits built now can shape brain health for decades to come. This decade is a key window to prioritize your brain health and many cases of Alzheimer's **CAN** be prevented with healthy habits!

What We Know About Alzheimer's Risk and Causes

Alzheimer's doesn't start when symptoms appear — it starts long before, over decades. And women are at the center of this story: nearly two-thirds of people living with Alzheimer's are women, and the reasons go beyond living longer. Biology, hormones, and life experience all play a role. That's why prevention starts earlier than most people think — often in midlife or even before (1). A recent study found that brain changes linked to Alzheimer's may be detectable as early as age 24 (2). Most cases are influenced by a mix of factors, including age, genetics, lifestyle choices, and medical conditions (3).

Can Alzheimer's Be Prevented?

In short: in many cases, yes! While scientists don't know exactly what causes Alzheimer's, it's linked to a mix of age, genetics, lifestyle, and environment (4,5). Fewer than 1% of people have a rare genetic mutation that causes early-onset Alzheimer's. For everyone else, risk is shaped by modifiable factors — meaning there are steps we can take. Research shows that up to 45% of dementia cases could be prevented (6).

Certain risks, like age or family history, can't be changed. But others — especially in midlife — can. Communities of color often face higher risk due to chronic conditions and barriers to care. Systemic racism, financial stress, and unequal access to healthcare — particularly for women of color — further compound the problem. That makes prevention even more essential.

There's no guaranteed way to prevent Alzheimer's, but emerging research highlights steps that may reduce risk or delay onset. The good news? Healthy habits you're likely already building — like moving more, eating well, and managing stress — also support brain health.

Protect Your Heart To Protect Your Brain

What's good for the heart is good for the brain. Managing blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, and other heart-related risks can significantly lower your chances of developing Alzheimer's. High blood pressure in midlife is strongly linked to dementia later on (7). Black Americans are twice as likely as older white Americans to have dementia, likely due to higher rates of heart disease and other chronic conditions.

Latinos are 1.5 times as likely to develop dementia, probably for similar reasons. A recent study found that middle-aged Black women with better heart health were less likely to experience memory loss (8). Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and not smoking are simple, powerful ways to protect both heart and brain.

Prioritize Metabolic Health

Metabolic health is about how well your body turns food into energy. It includes healthy blood sugar, weight, and cholesterol levels. Problems like prediabetes, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and metabolic syndrome (a group of conditions including high blood pressure, excess belly weight, and high blood sugar) can raise your risk for Alzheimer's. When the brain can't use sugar properly for energy, it may begin to show early signs of damage — even before memory problems appear. Some researchers call Alzheimer's "type 3 diabetes" because of this link. Staying active, eating well, and keeping blood sugar in check all help support brain health over time.

Move Your Body

Physical activity keeps blood flowing to the brain and may even help grow new brain cells. Exercise is one of the best ways to lower Alzheimer's risk — some studies show up to a 45% reduction (9). Aim for 150 minutes of moderate movement per week, including walking, dancing, or swimming. Research also supports combining cardio with strength training and sprint intervals (10).

Fuel Your Brain

A balanced diet — especially the Mediterranean or MIND diets — rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and healthy fats, has been linked to better cognitive health and a reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease (7). Emerging research also suggests that diet may influence brain health through the gut microbiome, affecting inflammation and other pathways associated with Alzheimer's (11).

Challenge Your Mind

Lifelong learning helps your brain stay flexible and resilient. Activities like learning a new skill, language, or musical instrument can help strengthen connections in the brain. While crossword puzzles and brain training type games can be fun and won't hurt, there is not enough evidence to show that they can prevent memory loss (12). Instead, look for something that's complex, challenging, and takes practice (13).

Stay Connected

Spending time with others supports emotional well-being and mental sharpness. Regular social interaction has been linked to a lower risk of cognitive decline and dementia.

Prioritize Good Sleep

Quality sleep is essential for brain health. Sleep helps clear waste products from the brain and plays a key role in memory consolidation. A study of over 2,800 older adults found that those who slept fewer than five hours per night were twice as likely to develop dementia and twice as likely to die within five years, compared to those who got six to eight hours of sleep (14). Prioritize a regular sleep schedule and seek help if you experience sleep disorders.

Address Hearing Loss

Untreated hearing loss may raise the risk of cognitive decline. Get your hearing checked regularly and use hearing aids if needed.

Support Hormonal Health and Manage Stress

Estrogen plays a key role in brain energy and memory. Hormonal shifts — during pregnancy, birth control use, or menopause — can affect how the brain works. Chronic stress, which can affect hormone levels, also takes a toll on memory and mood. Taking care of your hormones and finding ways to manage stress now can help support brain health long term.

What Experts Are Learning

Prevention science is evolving fast. Researchers are learning that brain changes start long before symptoms appear — and that sleep, inflammation, and even gut health may play a role. New tools like digital brain health apps and blood-based tests are helping doctors detect risk earlier than ever before.

Talk to Your Doctor

You don't have to wait for symptoms to take brain health seriously. If you have a family history of Alzheimer's or concerns about memory, mood, or stress, bring it up. Ask about brain-healthy habits, cognitive screening, or ways to track your brain health over time. Your 30s are a great time to start the conversation.

Keep the Conversation Going

Brain health isn't just about aging — it's about living well at every stage. Share what you're learning, support your friends, and advocate for yourself. The more we talk about prevention, the better we can care for our brains — and each other.