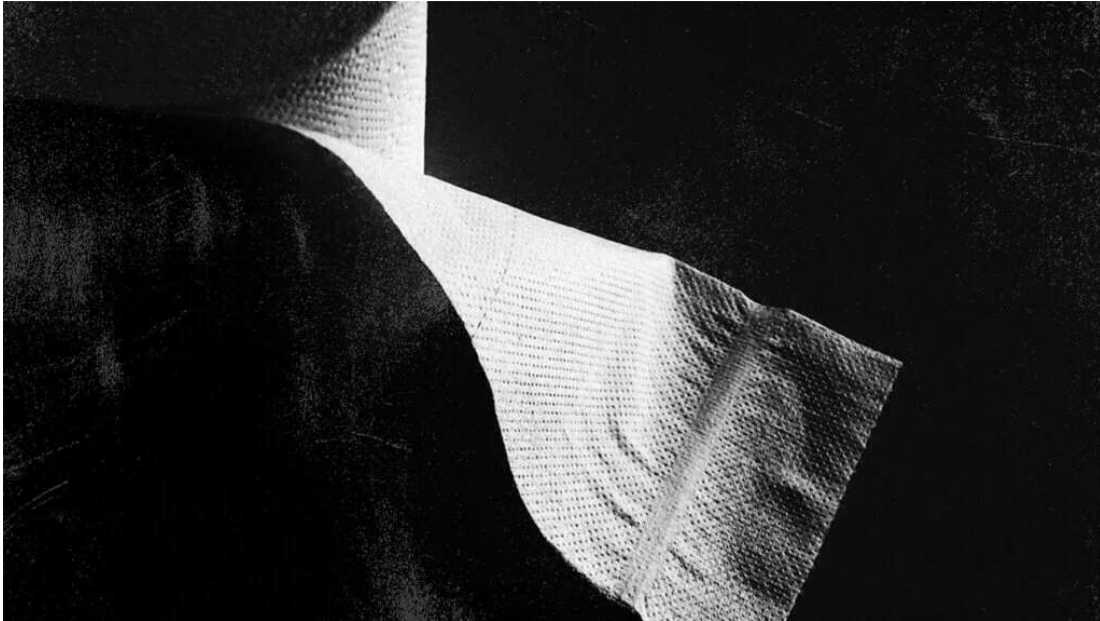


Regular laxative use linked to increased dementia risk



By [Annie Lennon](#) on February 23, 2023 — [Fact checked](#) by Alexandra Sanfins, Ph.D.



The type and frequency of people using laxatives may affect their dementia risk. Yutthana Teerakarunkar/EyeEm/Getty Images

- **Researchers investigated the effects of laxatives on dementia risk.**
- **They found that regular consumption of laxatives increases dementia risk.**
- **They noted that further studies are needed to confirm their findings.**

Around 20% of the [general population](#) [👍], 40% of community-dwelling older adults, and [70%](#) [👍] of nursing home residents live with constipation.

In the United Kingdom, around [85%](#) [👍] of people with constipation are treated with laxatives. As laxatives are available over the counter, laxative

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Studies show that laxative use can influence gut microbiota composition and induce long-term changes in the immune response. Research also shows that these changes may increase the production of toxins linked to inflammation, neural damage, and amyloid deposition- a biomarker for dementia.

Further investigation of how using laxatives and other agents that disrupt the microbiome may affect dementia could lead to improved treatment and prevention strategies.

Recently, researchers analyzed healthcare data to see whether laxative use is linked with dementia onset. They found that regular use of laxatives is linked to a higher risk of all-cause dementia.

“This study reports individuals with more laxative use have an increased likelihood of developing dementia relative to those with less laxative use,” Russell Swerdlow, neurologist, and co-director of KU Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, not involved in the study, told *Medical News Today*.

"Es interesante que las personas con al menos una enfermedad asociada con la demencia, la enfermedad de Parkinson, experimenten estreñimiento con una frecuencia más alta que las que no tienen la enfermedad de Parkinson", señaló.

"Tal vez haya quienes ahora quieran estudiar cómo los laxantes pueden provocar demencia, aunque al menos en un nivel superficial, parece tener más sentido estudiar cómo la biología que subyace a la demencia puede afectar al tracto gastrointestinal", agregó.

El estudio fue publicado en *Neurology*.

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Up to 65% increased risk

Los investigadores analizaron datos de atención médica de 502,229 participantes con una edad promedio de 56.5 años del Biobanco del Reino Unido.

En total, el 54,4% eran mujeres, y el 3,6% informaron el uso regular de laxantes (autoinformados) en la mayoría de los días de la semana durante las últimas cuatro semanas.

Durante un tiempo de seguimiento promedio de 9,8 años, el 1,3% de los participantes que usaron laxantes y el 0,4% de los no usuarios desarrollaron demencia.

Después de ajustar los factores demográficos, encontraron que el uso de laxantes aumentaba el riesgo de demencia por todas las causas y el riesgo de demencia vascular en un 51% y 65%.

Además, encontraron que el riesgo de demencia aumentó junto con el número de tipos de laxantes utilizados regularmente. El riesgo de demencia por todas las causas aumentó en un 28% para aquellos que usan un solo tipo de laxante y en un 90% para aquellos que usan dos o más laxantes en comparación con los no usuarios.

No increased risk for Alzheimer's

Sin embargo, los investigadores anotaron que el uso de laxantes no se vinculó con un mayor riesgo de Alzheimer, que comprende 60-70% de los casos de demencia ¹.

"Los hallazgos de este estudio sugirieron que el uso regular de laxantes, incluso sin eventos adversos graves a corto plazo, puede tener el riesgo potencial a largo plazo de demencia, especialmente cuando se trata de

Shenzhen, Academia China de Ciencias. uno de los autores correspondientes del estudio, dijo a *MNT*.

"De hecho, los laxantes osmóticos y estimulantes no se recomiendan para el uso regular, pero aún así encontramos muchos usuarios regulares de estos medicamentos en este estudio", anotó.

Los laxantes osmóticos funcionan atrayendo agua a las heces para ablandarlas y que puedan pasar con más frecuencia. Los laxantes estimulantes funcionan estimulando las contracciones musculares que se mueven a lo largo de la masa fecal.

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Is a disrupted microbiome to blame?

"Si bien los mecanismos exactos que vinculan los laxantes con la demencia aún no se han investigado, una posible explicación es que los laxantes pueden influir en la composición del microbioma intestinal y la función cognitiva en el eje microbioma-intestino-cerebro", señaló el profesor Sha.

"La alteración de la microbiota intestinal puede afectar la producción de numerosos neurotransmisores para la función cognitiva normal y aumentar la producción de toxinas intestinales

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revestimiento intestinal) y facilitar el paso de metabolitos neurotóxicos derivados de microbios intestinales al sistema nervioso central".

— Feng Sha, autor del estudio

Continuó diciendo que algunos microorganismos pueden llegar al cerebro en condiciones con una función de barrera reducida, como el accidente cerebrovascular, un factor de riesgo conocido para la demencia.

"De hecho, el [desequilibrio] de las bacterias intestinales causado por los laxantes podría aumentar la producción de N-óxido de trimetilamina (TMAO), un metabolito derivado del intestino, y su entrada en la sangre. Los altos niveles plasmáticos de TMAO conducen a hiperactividad plaquetaria, trombosis, inflamación vascular y aterosclerosis que contribuyen a la patología del accidente cerebrovascular y la demencia vascular", explicó.

No causal link, yet

"El estudio muestra una correlación en sus hallazgos, pero no necesariamente causalidad, ya que señala un aumento del 51% en el riesgo de demencia en comparación con aquellos que no usan laxantes, con un grupo de prueba de aproximadamente 500,000 que usaron laxantes", dijo el psiquiatra Dr. Howard Pratt, director médico de salud conductual de Community Health of South Florida, Inc. (CHI), que no participó en el estudio, le dijo a *MNT*.

"Entonces, eso no quiere decir que las personas que usan laxantes vayan a tener demencia, sino que el estudio apunta una correlación", anotó.

El profesor Sha agregó que no pudieron tener en cuenta los factores personales que predisponen al uso de laxantes, como la ingesta de fibra dietética y la gravedad del estreñimiento. y que no exploraron la relación

¿Debo dejar de usar laxantes?

"Si bien 500,000 es un número significativo de personas observadas en el estudio, esto es algo que debe explorarse más a fondo", dijo el Dr. Pratt.

"Esto no quiere decir que las personas deban dejar de usar laxantes por completo; Sin embargo, también deben centrarse en una dieta alta en fibra y una mayor ingesta de agua porque muchos de estos laxantes pueden deshidratar a una persona, y la deshidratación es una de las causas más comunes de estreñimiento".

— Dr. Howard Pratt

"Muchos pacientes con estreñimiento pueden abusar de los laxantes porque tienden a autotratarse con los medicamentos de venta libre. Por lo tanto, los farmacéuticos y los médicos deben estar bien situados para proporcionar instrucciones a los pacientes sobre el uso de medicamentos



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El Dr. Sha agregó que se necesitan más estudios para confirmar el vínculo entre el uso de laxantes y la demencia.

"También se necesitan más estudios para identificar posibles factores contribuyentes o mecanismos específicos que puedan ser responsables de las asociaciones observadas en nuestro estudio", dijo.

"Los estudios [futuros] también deben investigar sus asociaciones con otras enfermedades crónicas, como el accidente cerebrovascular, la depresión y las enfermedades de Parkinson que podrían vincularse a través de los mismos mecanismos", añadió.

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"En lugar del uso regular de laxantes, el estreñimiento puede mitigarse la mayor parte del tiempo mediante cambios en el estilo de vida, como aumentar la ingesta de líquidos, fibra dietética y niveles de actividad, lo que también puede beneficiar la salud del cerebro".

— Feng Sha

Alzheimer / Demencia GastroIntestinal / Gastroenterología Drogas

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MITOS MÉDICOS

Mitos médicos: todo sobre la demencia

Bienvenido a la última edición de nuestra serie Mitos médicos. Hoy, para conmemorar el Día Mundial del Alzheimer, abordaremos los mitos relacionados con la enfermedad de Alzheimer y la demencia en general.



By [Tim Newman](#) el 21 de septiembre de 2020 — [Hecho verificado](#) por Zia Sherrell, MPH

En nuestra serie Mitos médicos, abordamos la desinformación médica de frente. Utilizando la visión experta y la investigación revisada por pares para luchar contra los hechos de la ficción, MNT aporta claridad al mundo plagado de mitos del periodismo de salud.



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podría alcanzar 13,8 millones [✓].

Figures of this stature spark justifiable fear, and, as we have found in previous Medical Myths [articles](#), fear tends to breed misconceptions.

In this article, we aim to dispel 11 of these myths.

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1. Dementia is inevitable with age

This statement is not true. Dementia is not a normal part of aging.

According to a report that the Alzheimer's Association published, Alzheimer's disease, which is the most common form of dementia, affects 3% of people aged 65–74 years in the U.S.

As a result of the risk increasing as we age, 17% of people aged 75–84 years and 32% of people aged 85 years and older have a dementia diagnosis.

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2. Dementia and Alzheimer's disease are the same thing

This is not quite correct. Alzheimer's is a type of dementia, accounting for 60–80% of all dementia cases. Other types of dementia include frontotemporal dementia (FTD), vascular dementia, mixed dementia, and Lewy body dementia.

The [National Institute on Aging](#) define dementia as “the loss of cognitive functioning — thinking, remembering, and reasoning — and behavioral abilities to such an extent that it interferes with a person's daily life and activities.”

Although dementias share certain characteristics, each type has a distinct underlying pathology.

Alzheimer's disease is associated with a buildup of so-called plaques and tangles in the brain. These structures interfere with brain cells, eventually killing them. In contrast, brain cell death in vascular dementia occurs due to a lack of oxygen, which can result from a stroke, for instance.

FTD, as another example, occurs when abnormal protein structures form in the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain, causing the brain cells in these regions to die.

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A common myth is that dementia is purely genetic. In other words, if a person's family member has a dementia diagnosis, they are guaranteed to develop dementia later in life. This is not true.

Although there is a genetic component to some forms of dementia, the majority of cases do not have a strong genetic link.

As we learned above, rather than genetic factors, the most significant risk factor for dementia is age. However, if a parent or grandparent developed Alzheimer's when they were younger than 65 years, the chance of it passing on genetically is higher.

Early-onset Alzheimer's is relatively uncommon, though. It occurs in about 5.5% of all Alzheimer's cases.

As the majority of dementia cases are Alzheimer's disease, this means that most dementia cases are not hereditary. FTD, which is much less common, has a stronger genetic link, but if a parent or grandparent develops the condition, it does not mean that children or grandchildren are guaranteed to develop it.

Today, FTD affects an estimated 15–22 in every 100,000 people. Of these individuals, 10–15% have a strong family history of the condition.


4. Dementia only affects older adults

Age is a risk factor for dementia, but dementia can affect younger adults in rare cases. Some scientists estimate that, in people aged 30–64 years, 38–260 people in 100,000 — equivalent to 0.038–0.26% — develop early-onset dementia.

In the 55–64 age bracket, this increases to close to 420 people in 100,000, or 0.4%.

5. Using aluminum pans causes Alzheimer's

that form in the brains of people with Alzheimer's.

Additionally, some [studies](#)  have identified aluminum within the plaques associated with Alzheimer's. However, aluminum also appears in the healthy brain, and researchers have not established a causal link between this element and the disease.

Following on from these studies, myths still circulate that drinking from aluminum cans or cooking with aluminum pots increases the risk of Alzheimer's.

However, since those early experiments, scientists have not found a clear association between Alzheimer's and using aluminum pots and pans.


Although researchers will, eventually, establish the precise relationship between aluminum and Alzheimer's, consuming aluminum through the diet is unlikely to play a major role.

As the [Alzheimer's Society](#) explain: "Aluminum in food and drink is in a form that is not easily absorbed into the body. Hence, the amount taken up is less than 1% of the amount present in food and drink. Most of the aluminum taken into the body is cleaned out by the kidneys."

However, they also write that some research has found "a potential role for high dose aluminum in drinking water in progressing Alzheimer's disease for people who already have the disease."

6. Dementia signals the end of a meaningful life

Thankfully, this is not the case. Many people with a dementia diagnosis lead active, meaningful lives. Some people fear that if a doctor diagnoses them with dementia, they will no longer be able to go for a walk alone and will have to stop driving their vehicle immediately.

It is true that these adjustments may come in time as the condition progresses, but in mild cases of dementia, no changes  may be

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their life are likely, but that does not mean that the person cannot lead a fulfilling life.

“Too many people are in the dark about dementia — many feel that a dementia diagnosis means someone is immediately incapable of living a normal life, while myths and misunderstandings continue to contribute to the stigma and isolation that many people will feel,” [explains](#) Jeremy Hughes, former Chief Executive of the Alzheimer’s Society.

“[W]e want to reassure people that life doesn’t end when dementia begins.”

– Jeremy Hughes

7. Memory loss always signifies dementia

Although memory loss can be an early symptom of dementia, it does not necessarily signify the start of this condition. Human memory can be unpredictable, and we all forget things occasionally. However, if memory loss is interfering with everyday life, it is best to speak with a doctor.

Although memory issues tend to be an [early sign](#) of Alzheimer’s disease, that is not the case for other forms of dementia. For instance, [early signs and symptoms](#) of FTD can include changes in mood and personality, language difficulties, and obsessive behavior.

8. Dementia is always preventable

This, unfortunately, is untrue. Importantly, though, certain factors can either reduce the risk of certain types of dementia developing or delay their onset.

dementia:

- less education
- hypertension
- hearing impairment
- smoking
- obesity
- depression
- physical inactivity
- diabetes
- low levels of social contact
- alcohol consumption
- traumatic brain injury
- air pollution

Some of these factors are more difficult to modify than others, but working on changing any of them might help reduce the risk of developing dementia. The authors of the report explain:

“Together, the 12 modifiable risk factors account for around 40% of worldwide dementias, which consequently could theoretically be prevented or delayed.”

However, as Dr. Nancy Sicotte, a neurologist at Cedars-Sinai hospital in Los Angeles, CA, explains, “Reducing your risk requires starting these lifestyle changes from the get-go, not waiting until you’re 70.”

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9. Vitamins and supplements can prevent dementia

Linked to the section above, this is also false. To date, there is no strong evidence that any vitamin or mineral supplements can reduce the risk of dementia. In 2018, the Cochrane Library conducted a [review](#) with the aim of answering this question.

Their analysis included data from more than 83,000 participants across the 28 included studies. Although the authors report “some general limitations of the evidence,” they conclude:

“We did not find evidence that any vitamin or mineral supplementation strategy for cognitively healthy adults in mid or late life has a meaningful effect on cognitive decline or dementia, although the evidence does not permit definitive conclusions.”

10. All people with dementia become aggressive

In some cases, people with dementia might find it increasingly hard to make sense of the world around them. This confusion can be frustrating, and some individuals might respond to the emotions in an angry manner. However, this is not the case for everyone.

In a study involving 215 people with dementia, 41% of the participants

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identified two of the primary factors as physical pain and a low quality relationship between the person and their caregiver.

11. Dementia is never fatal

Unfortunately, dementia can be fatal. According to a [2020 study](#) among adults aged 70-99 years, dementia may be a more common cause of death than experts have traditionally thought. The authors “found that approximately 13.6% of deaths were attributable to dementia over the period 2000–2009.”

Dementia worries people, especially as they age, and this is justifiable in many ways. However, it is important to counter misinformation that might enhance concerns and stigma.

For now, researchers are working tirelessly to develop better ways to treat and prevent dementia. In the future, hopefully, science will reduce the impact of dementia and, therefore, the fear associated with the condition.

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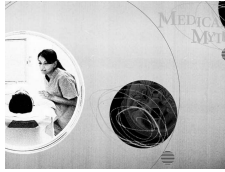
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