Time matters in brain health

How should society prepare for a growing population at risk of neurodegenerative diseases?

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Why does time matter?

People at risk
'Brain diseases' are generally regarded as a problem for the elderly, but neurodegeneration begins in middle age.

Growing burden
The number of affected individuals is predicted to rise; we are poorly prepared to deal with this.

Window of change
There is a window of opportunity to make changes earlier, to reduce risk and prevent or delay the onset of symptoms.

High priority
We need to encourage society and individuals to prioritize brain health and prevent neurodegeneration.
How was the report developed?

An expert group developed evidence-based recommendations and a call to action encouraging positive behaviour change and policies to promote brain health, working towards the prevention of neurodegenerative diseases.
The message “what’s good for your heart is generally good for your brain” needs to be widely communicated and understood.

The group produced 18 recommendations:
- 5 health promotion
- 2 clinical practice
- 11 research/decision-making

Encourage behaviours at all ages that help to improve brain health, such as healthy eating and taking adequate exercise.

Identify the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions to promote brain health.

Understand the extent to which an individual’s awareness that he or she has strong risk factors for a neurodegenerative disease may motivate them to change their behaviour, and how best to support that behaviour change.

Assess the relative weight of different risk factors (e.g. lifestyle, genetic and molecular factors) and the interactions between them, so that decision-makers can decide how to prioritize and address them.
What next?

A collaborative effort is needed to achieve our common goals

**Behaviour change**
The report highlights the need for everyone to prioritize their brain health and to implement behaviours that reduce the risks as they age.

**Education**
Policymakers, public health bodies and health professionals must educate and empower the public.

**Research**
Further work is needed to validate diagnostic tools to identify people at risk and develop effective treatments.

**Health checks**
National programmes could be introduced in the future to assess risk for neurodegeneration and detect and treat disease early.
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