Convincing the public that time really does matter in brain health

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Why does time matter?

Public awareness
To maximize the potential for early intervention, the general public needs to understand the modifiable risk factors that can affect their brain health.

Diagnostic development
Biomarkers in development will help to diagnose the underlying cause of dementia early.

Window of opportunity
Adjustment of modifiable lifestyle factors in early-to-midlife can significantly help to reduce the risk of developing a neurodegenerative disease.
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.
Health promotion recommendations

- Policymakers and public health bodies should act on the recommendations:
  - Protect and provide public health budgets
  - Encourage behaviour to improve brain health
  - Support and empower individuals to make lifestyle changes
  - Prepare for (commercial) genetic testing
  - Provide access to available and effective treatments

“What’s good for your heart is good for your brain”
Clinical recommendations

• Healthcare professionals and administrators play a key role in the management of people with, or at risk of, a neurodegenerative disease and should act on the two clinical recommendations:
  • Refer to specialist or multidisciplinary services
  • Provide follow-up with ongoing, widely accessible holistic care, including prevention information, treatment options and support
Researchers and organizations that fund scientific research, as well as healthcare decision makers should act on the recommendations:

- Develop treatments for neurodegenerative diseases
- Validate diagnostic tools to identify people at risk
- Facilitate earlier disease detection and intervention
- Additional funding is needed to deliver key research recommendations

Priority research goals include:

- Identifying the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions to promote brain health
- Understanding how people with risk factors for a neurodegenerative disease may be motivated to change their behaviour
- Assessing the relative weight of different risk factors and their interactions
There is a window of opportunity for healthcare intervention!

But public understanding is generally poor

Health systems are not yet equipped to manage the large numbers of people who are potentially at high risk of long-term neurodegenerative conditions

The general public needs to understand risk factors and what can be done to maintain brain health

Dementia is not an inevitable part of ageing
What does the general public need to know about risk factors for neurodegenerative diseases?

Current perceptions of risk reduction

Which, if any, of the following health conditions do you think it’s possible for people to reduce their risk of developing?

- Diabetes: 81%
- Heart disease: 77%
- Stroke: 60%
- Cancer: 52%
- Dementia: 34%

34% of respondents think it is possible for people to reduce their risk of developing dementia.

None of these: 3%
Don’t know: 2%

More and more individuals are keen to know their risk of brain disease.
Genetic testing is available on a commercial basis.
How best to communicate to individuals the potentially complex results of genetic tests needs to be studied.
Appropriate training for this is needed to help them encourage behavioural changes that reduce individual risk of brain disease.
Conclusions

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.
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