

Lack of interest linked with increased risk of dementia

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Research published in the journal *Neurology* suggests those who lack interest in the world around them are at an increased risk of developing dementia.

The research team looked to see whether developing dementia was linked to apathy. People with apathy often have a lack of interest in the world around them, with signs of apathy including stopping taking part in normal activities, showing little emotion, and a lack of energy. In this study, the team used a questionnaire designed to evaluate apathy in over 2,000 people and to discriminate apathy from depression and anxiety.

They divided the volunteers into groups corresponding to low, moderate, or severe apathy. The team determined whether people developed dementia with an algorithm based on information on dementia medication use, hospital records, or a significant decline in memory and thinking.

The team followed participants over nine years and found 381 volunteers developed likely dementia. They found that severe apathy was linked with an

[increased risk](#) of dementia compared to low apathy. Apathy was also associated with worse memory and thinking at the beginning of the study, but not rate of change over time.

Dr. Sara Imarisio, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said, "Symptoms of apathy are common in dementia and are not necessarily symptoms of depression. Many people with dementia are mistakenly diagnosed as having depression, particularly in the early stages. Building a better understanding of some of the less well-recognized symptoms of dementia, like apathy, could inform our efforts to develop better treatments for the condition."

"The scientists in this study used algorithms to identify likely dementia, and a dementia diagnosis wasn't necessarily confirmed by a doctor. It's important to understand how health and lifestyle factors can influence dementia risk and it's still not clear whether [apathy](#) contributes to memory problems or vice versa. To continue to unpick this link and make real breakthroughs for people who need them, we need to see sustained investment in [dementia](#) research."

More information: Meredith A. Bock et al. Apathy and risk of probable incident dementia among community-dwelling older adults, *Neurology* (2020). DOI: [10.1212/wnl.00000000000010951](https://doi.org/10.1212/wnl.00000000000010951)

Provided by Alzheimers Research UK

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