

One in 10 UK adults say brain health has deteriorated in pandemic



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More than one in 10 adults in the UK (14%) believe their brain health has declined since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, new polling by Alzheimer's Research UK has revealed, with two-thirds (66%) saying the pandemic has prompted them to think about making changes to improve their health. The news comes as Alzheimer's Research UK launches Think Brain Health, a bold new awareness campaign to empower people to keep their brains healthy throughout life and ultimately, help reduce their risk of dementia.

The digital campaign is backed by the latest research and focuses on three rules for brain health – looking after heart health, staying sharp and keeping connected. Think Brain Health is backed by broadcast journalist Suzi Perry, who lost her grandmother Mary to Alzheimer's disease – the most common cause of dementia.

The campaign was developed with the support of Warburtons and parkrun and is further backed at launch by Alzheimer's Research UK partner Garmin.

Alzheimer's Research UK has also worked with the Royal Society for Public Health to launch a joint policy report on brain health, recommending the development of a national brain health strategy to enable everyone to take positive steps to look after their brains throughout life. The report calls on government to take this opportunity to embed brain health messaging for all age groups, implement cost-effective interventions that promote brain health and fund more research into dementia prevention.

As well as being influenced by our age and genetics, the 2020

Lancet Commission on dementia suggests that up to 40% of dementia cases could be linked to 12 risk factors that we may be able to influence, including high blood pressure, physical inactivity, smoking, low social contact and depression.

With polling showing that people's awareness of dementia has increased more than any other health condition due to the pandemic (16% reporting an increased awareness), the charity believes now is the opportune time to support people to take positive action, particularly with new lockdown measures in place.

Alzheimer's Research UK's Think Brain Health campaign aims to increase awareness of three rules for improving brain health:

Visitors to thinkbrainhealth.org.uk can test their brain health knowledge with a quiz, as well as learning more through expert blogs and articles. The campaign is primarily aimed at people in midlife, who could stand to gain the most from adopting healthy habits that could reduce their risk of dementia.

Suzi Perry, known for her work on BT Sport's Motorsport coverage and F1 coverage for the BBC, has voiced an animation introducing the Think Brain Health campaign. Reflecting on the impact of dementia in her own family, she said:

"I was very close to my grandma: she was a huge part of my life growing up and in many ways she was more like a friend than a grandma. She had a great wit, she wasn't scared to speak her mind and she was always very encouraging to me. It was incredibly hard to watch her deteriorate as dementia took hold, and to see the impact it had for my mum, too. I felt angry at the disease for robbing us of the person we loved.

"That experience of dementia gave me an awareness of what can happen to your brain and the importance of looking after it. I don't think I know anyone whose life hasn't been touched by dementia at some point, and we should absolutely be doing all we can to reduce people's risk of developing the condition. It's vital that we act now and educate people on

what we can all do ourselves to help our brains, and this campaign is so important for spreading that message.”

Hilary Evans, Chief Executive of Alzheimer’s Research UK, said:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll in many ways, and it’s deeply worrying that one in 10 of us fear it’s had a negative effect on our brain health. But positively, our polling shows that the pandemic has also made people more aware of their health, so we want to take this opportunity to set out some simple steps to help people think about their brain. While national lockdown is making many aspects of our lives more difficult, there are still things you can do every day to look after your brain and the Think Brain Health campaign shows you how. “Our brains control everything we do, from storing precious memories to helping us read and write – they define who we are. Sadly, every year, more and more families experience the devastation caused when physical diseases like Alzheimer’s take hold of the brain. “The good news is that while there’s no sure-fire way to prevent dementia, research suggests that 40% of cases could be down to factors that we may be able to influence. We must do all we can to capitalise on this powerful opportunity and ultimately, reduce the number of people who will go on to develop dementia in future. “There is a clear appetite among the public to improve their health and looking after the brain must become a core part of our approach to good overall health. The time is right for a national brain health strategy to enable everyone to keep their brains healthy – and Alzheimer’s Research UK’s Think Brain Health campaign is an important first step.”

To find out more, visit thinkbrainhealth.org.uk

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