

Dementia Risk Factors for Veterans

by Shelley Krupa, Business Operations Coordinator Lake Hallie Memory Care



Is there a connection between a younger veteran's time in the service and their contracting dementia after being discharged? Maybe.

Isn't dementia or Alzheimer's disease an older person's disease? Yes, we know the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's is being over the age of 65, but every person with a brain is at risk for dementia, at any age.

When a younger veteran is admitted to a memory care facility before they turn 65 years of age, they've no doubt struggled due to an early onset of some type of brain injury-induced dementia.

Veterans are significantly more at risk for a diagnosis of dementia than those who haven't served. What are the risk factors for veterans who served? Traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress, blast-induced neurotrauma, successive concussion syndrome, and depression. A daunting list, right?

Damages to the brain resulting from stresses once a veteran is no longer in service can add up. While depression can linger for years, it often leads to drinking or drugs, damaging the brain even further. Lifestyle risks, plus their in-service risks, compound their brains for contracting dementia as veterans age.

What about their diets? When in service, veterans are fed 3 balanced meals a day, comprised 50% or more of carbohydrates in the 3000-4000 calories/day. Those calories provided the energy needed for daily activities. Once they are out of service, the need for so many calories diminishes.

Any overindulgence in carb-loaded meals and treats for comfort measures adds to the hidden causes of dementia. That slow icing on the cake adds layers to the progression of damage to the brain via a less than healthy diet.

When they are out of service, daily exercise decreases. Coupled with continued eating of sweet treats, many veterans will find the need to loosen up belt buckles around their waistlines.

Those who continue eating a higher calorie and carb-loaded diet, like the standard American diet, will end up adding pounds, causing diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, etc. These all increase their risk factors of causes for a variety of dementias.

What can veterans do to prevent or help their brains stay healthy for as long as possible after they discharge from service? At the first signs of mild cognitive impairment, seek out a professional evaluation or research Veterans Against Alzheimer's for tips on who to contact.

Protect brain health by enlisting in healthy lifestyle changes. Revive the daily discipline of exercising - a 30-minute brisk walk per day is beneficial. Pull out the old uniform and try it on for size - if it still fits you're on a great track for maintaining a healthy weight. If not, and there's a bulging waistline or a BMI that's growing in numbers, retreat from sugar-loaded treats that aren't good for your brain. Skip out on the cookies, cut down on carbohydrate-loaded meals, switch your meals to a Mediterranean diet, and notice if your symptoms improve.

Be bold, brave, and do your best to protect your brain!

