How you could keep dementia at bay

Here are five things you can do to reduce the risk of dementia

Dementia is a devastating illness that affects one in 10 people over 65 but recent research suggests there are things you can do to reduce the risk of it happening to you.

The Economic Cost of Dementia in Australia report estimates that 413,000 Australians are living with dementia. One in four people over the age of 85 will have dementia and by the age of 95, it’s one in two.

Dementia is not one disease but a range of conditions that cause a loss of mental functioning as we age. While age is the biggest risk factor, dementia is not inevitable.

What to do

Dr Maree Farrow, a cognitive neuroscientist with the University of Tasmania’s Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, says there are five key ways to reduce your risk:

Source:
1. **Stay mentally active**

People who have mentally stimulating jobs or hobbies have a lower chance of developing dementia as they age. “It’s learning something new or different that’s important,” Dr Farrow says.

2. **Stay physically active**

Physical activity helps grow new brain cells and new connections between brain cells. It also boosts the levels of the chemicals that help keep brain cells healthy.

3. **Eat well**

The most positive results on diet point to fruit and vegetables, which are rich in antioxidants.

4. **Stay socially active**

A large network of friends helps your brain. “You have to understand facial expressions and body language,” Dr Farrow says. “Lots of different parts of your brain are working.”

5. **Watch your key numbers**

Keep your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels in the healthy range. If the blood vessels in your brain are unhealthy, they will damage your brain cells.