

# Reducing blood pressure may help to stave off dementia

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**A trial found that patients who were intensively treated to reduce blood pressure were less likely to develop cognitive impairment** ANTHONY DEVLIN/PA

Lowering blood pressure could help to protect against the early signs of dementia, a trial has suggested.

Those who were intensively treated with drugs to get their blood pressure into the ideal range were 19 per cent less likely to develop mild cognitive impairment, often a forerunner of dementia.

However, although there were signs that this would translate into protection against dementia, the trial was not able to show this. Scientists will continue the research in the hope of pinning down an effect.

Previous studies have suggested that people with high blood pressure were more likely to develop dementia, but it had not been proven that lowering it could reduce the risk. There is at present no treatment for the condition, which affects more than 200,000 people a year in Britain, and so finding ways to prevent dementia has become increasingly important.

The latest trial studied 9,400 people with an average age of 68 who were treated to reduce their systolic blood pressure to either below 140mmHg, the normal point at which blood pressure is categorised as high, or more intensively to get it below 120mmHg, which is considered ideal.

They were treated for three years, after which the trial had to be stopped early because it was so clear that lower blood pressure protected against heart disease that it was considered unethical not to let all the patients benefit.

After five years, 149 people on intensive treatment had developed dementia, compared with 176 on standard treatment. However, this difference was not statistically significant, meaning that the researchers could not be confident it was not a matter of chance.

Rates of mild cognitive impairment, assessed by questionnaires, however, were significantly lower in those given intensive treatment, according to the results published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Jeff Williamson, of Wake Forest School of Medicine in North Carolina, who led the study, said: “We are encouraged to finally have a proven intervention to lower someone’s risk for mild cognitive impairment.”

Dementia typically takes a long time to develop and his team will follow up participants to see if a significant difference emerges between the two groups.

Maria Carrillo from the US Alzheimer’s Association, praised the trial as offering “genuine, concrete hope” of preventing dementia. James Pickett of the Alzheimer’s Society in the UK said that because this study was stopped early, “we can’t take a lot from the findings.”