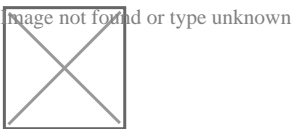




## Study: Older adults who regularly use the internet have LESS DEMENTIA RISK than non-regular users

### Description



### ADVERTISEMENT

Regular internet usage is often painted as a negative, but research has found a positive to the practice – especially in the case of older users.

A longitudinal study of a large group of older adults showed that regular internet users had approximately half the risk of dementia compared to their same-age peers who did not use the internet regularly. Participants using the internet between six minutes and two hours per day had the lowest risk of dementia, according to the study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

The authors said public discussions about internet use often revolve around problematic internet use – particularly among children and adolescents. But they noticed that this difference remained even after controlling for education, ethnicity, sex, generation and signs of cognitive decline at the start of the study. (Related: Too much internet use can lead to depression in young people.)

Studies often link large amounts of time spent on the internet with various adverse conditions. However, the internet also forms the backbone of modern economy and entertainment – providing lots of cognitively engaging content that is relatively easy to access.

Additionally, scientists have previously shown that online engagement can make individuals more

resilient against brain decay or physiological damage to the brain that develops as people age.

This can, in turn, help older adults compensate for brain aging and reduce the risk of dementia. In this way, internet use can help extend the cognitively healthy lifespan.

Indeed, previous studies have shown that internet users tend to have better overall cognitive performance, verbal reasoning and memory than non-users.

However, most of these studies did not track changes over time or tracked them for very short periods. Thus, it could not be determined whether internet use helps maintain cognitive functioning or whether individuals with better cognitive functioning were more likely to use the internet.

In this paper, corresponding study author Dr. Virginia Chang and her colleagues wanted to examine how the risk of developing dementia is associated with whether adults regularly use the internet.

They were also interested in how this association changes over time and how the total period of internet use in late adulthood is associated with the risk of dementia.

Finally, they wanted to see if there might be an adverse effect of excessive internet use by examining the association between the risk of dementia and the daily number of hours spent on the internet.

## **How the study was done**

The researchers followed more than 18,000 dementia-free adults and analyzed data from The Health and Retirement Study – an ongoing longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of U.S. older-age adults aged 50 and over.

All 18,154 participants were born before 1966 and were aged between 50 and 65 years at the start of the analysis period. The median follow-up period of participants whose data were analyzed in this study was eight years, but it went up to 17 years with some.

Data analyses were conducted from September 2021 to November 2022. The researchers examined the relationship between internet usage and education, race-ethnicity, sex and generation.

Moreover, they examined whether the risk of dementia varied by the cumulative period of internet usage to see if starting or continuing usage in old age modulated subsequent risk.

The study interviewed participants every second year since 2002 about their internet usage, including frequency, duration and purpose of internet use.

Assessments of dementia were also conducted every second year through the modified Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status. Study authors calculated how long participants survived without dementia. They also used various demographic data about participants in their analysis.

## **What the study showed**

Over the years, internet usage was monitored as was cognitive decline. Data statistics showed the following:

- 65 percent of participants were regular internet users and 35 percent were non-regular users
- 21 percent changed their internet use habits during the study period while 53 percent did not change them
- 26 percent dropped out
- Eight percent died during the follow-up period or experienced another event and were excluded from further analysis

- Five percent of participants developed dementia during the study period

Regular internet users had a 1.54 percent chance of developing dementia. This risk was 10.45 percent for non-regular users.

When time until the development of dementia was analyzed, results showed that the risk of dementia of regular internet users was 57 percent lower than the risk non-regular users had of developing dementia.

Findings showed the relationship between dementia risk and daily hours of internet usage was U-shaped.

Adults using the internet between six minutes and two hours per day were found to have the lowest risk of dementia. This risk was much higher in adults who did not use the internet at all but also increased gradually with more daily internet use beyond two hours.

The study authors said: "Our findings show evidence of a digital divide in the cognitive health of older-age adults. Specifically, adults who regularly used the internet experienced approximately half the risk of dementia than adults who did not, adjusting for baseline cognitive function, self-selection into baseline internet usage, self-reported health and a large number of demographic characteristics."

The study had limitations that needed to be taken into account. Notably, the dementia assessment used might not completely agree with clinical diagnoses of dementia.

Additionally, the study included only individuals without dementia at the start of the study and excluded individuals who developed dementia early. Results might not have been the same if such individuals, who are part of the general population, were included in the study.

Watch this video explaining why the internet must go.

This video is from the Puretrauma357 channel on *Brighteon.com*.

by Olivia Cook

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