

Regular Daytime Naps Reduce Dementia Risk, Claims Intelligence Expert

"Your brain-mind is the highest-value asset you have, or will ever have," Mohamed Elmasry said.

By Pandora Dewan

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Simple daily habits, like taking a short nap and staying active, could reduce your risk of dementia, according to artificial intelligence (AI) expert and University of Waterloo professor Mohamed Elmasry.

More than 5 million Americans over the age of 65 live with dementia, according to 2014 data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)). Dementia comes in different forms—the most common form is Alzheimer's disease—and is characterized by an impaired ability to remember, think and make decisions.

Scientists believe that Alzheimer's is caused by the abnormal buildup of proteins in and around our brain cells, although exactly what triggers

this buildup is still unclear. But what we do know is that our risk of developing Alzheimer's is dependent on a range of genetic and environmental factors.

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In his new upcoming book, *iMind: Artificial and Real Intelligence*, Elmasry writes that our increasing reliance on AI could be raising our risk of developing dementia and other forms of cognitive decline.



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"AI has become a household topic," Elmasry told *Newsweek*. "We should know what AI can and can't do. But Real Intelligence is far more important; we should take care of it by paying attention to our physical, mental, and spiritual fitness."

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Just like our muscles, our memory needs regular exercise and is thought to obey a "use it or lose it" principle.

"Humans can intentionally develop and test their memories by playing 'brain games,' or performing daily brain exercises," Elmasry writes.

By relying on [Google](#) and other search engines, Elmasry says that we are neglecting this brain training and allowing AI to replace what he describes as "real intelligence."

As well as exercising our brains, it is important we give them regular breaks. Increasingly, studies have shown that taking regular, short daytime naps improves our performance in cognitive tests, particularly those associated with memory. Elmasry describes naps as "resets" to refresh our memories and other brain and body functions.

"Napping is to give our brain a good sleep at midday to recharge, to rewrite our memory, and

to dream," he said. "The alternative? A brain that works non-stop, say from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

"You can't force your brain and body to take a nap longer than what they need. If you're working, use part of your noon break for a nap, put your head on your hands, on your desk. If you're retired, any time is napping time, and do it in bed."

Elmasry also recommends integrating a day of true rest into your weekly schedule, staying active, adopting a healthy diet and minimizing alcohol consumption. [Chronic stress](#) has also been associated with a higher risk of cognitive decline.

"I eat well, stress myself less, exercise more, read more, meditate more, take a nap often, no drinking, no smoking, carry a conversation with family, friends, and strangers and write books (to write a book you need to read more than 50)," Elmasry said.

He added that he was inspired to write *iMind: Artificial and Real Intelligence* after his brother-in-law died from Alzheimer's disease, as well as his mother who fell victim to other forms of dementia.

"Your brain-mind is the highest-value asset you have, or will ever have. Increase its potential and longevity by caring for it early in life,

keeping it and your body healthy so it can continue to develop," he writes.

Do you have a tip on a health story that *Newsweek* should be covering? Do you have a question about dementia? Let us know via science@newsweek.com.

Update 07/22/24 at 4:13 a.m. ET: This article was updated to include additional comment from Professor Elmasry.

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