



DEMENTIA FUNDERS NETWORK

Dementia research news summary - March/April 2026

Research Highlights

AI and Early Diagnosis

Artificial intelligence and advanced computing are transforming Alzheimer's research. Scientists at USC have developed models that accelerate the discovery process, allowing for faster identification of disease mechanisms and potential treatments. Meanwhile, new machine learning tools from UC and Cambridge can now predict Alzheimer's onset up to **seven years before symptoms appear**, with 70–80% accuracy. These models also distinguish sex-specific risk factors — for example, osteoporosis in women and erectile dysfunction in men. weforum.org alzoc.org

New Alzheimer's Blood Test Gains Ground

The FDA approved a **blood test** for early Alzheimer's detection in people over 55 showing symptoms, offering a cheaper, less invasive alternative to PET scans or spinal taps. This test detects amyloid plaques, improving access to early diagnosis and intervention. weforum.org

Drug Progress — But With Mixed Results

New drugs **donanemab** and **lecanemab**, designed to block harmful beta-amyloid proteins, continue to show partial success. Studies suggest they can slow cognitive decline by roughly 30% overall, and possibly up to 60% if used early — but results remain modest, with some trials showing minimal improvement on cognitive scales. weforum.org

Dopamine's Role in Memory Loss

Researchers at **UC Irvine** found that a loss of dopamine function in the **entorhinal cortex** — a critical memory-processing region — directly drives memory deficits in Alzheimer's. This discovery could lead to new therapies targeting dopamine pathways to restore cognitive function. alzoc.org

The Gut–Brain Connection

Emerging research shows that **weakened gut-to-brain signaling** may hinder learning, memory, and overall cognitive clarity. Strengthening gut health could become a new frontier in dementia prevention. alzoc.org

Lifestyle, Prevention, and Cognitive Health

Lifelong Learning Cuts Alzheimer's Risk by 38%

A major study from the *American Academy of Neurology* found that people who engage in **mentally stimulating activities** (reading, writing, learning new skills) across their lives have a **38% lower risk of Alzheimer's** and develop symptoms up to **five years later** than less mentally active peers. [sciencedaily.com](https://www.sciencedaily.com)

Plant-Based Diets Boost Brain Health After 50

Data from nearly 93,000 adults showed that diets rich in **whole plant foods** — especially vegetables, fruits, and grains — are linked to lower dementia risk. The benefit appears strongest for those who replace processed foods with nutrient-dense options. alzoc.org

Brain Training Shows Long-Term Protection

Twenty years after a cognitive training trial, participants who practiced **speed-based brain training exercises** for just 22 hours had significantly lower rates of dementia, underscoring the long-term value of keeping the brain active. alzoc.org

Sleep and Circadian Health Still Key

Studies continue to confirm that **deep sleep quality** and stable circadian rhythms are vital to slowing Alzheimer's progression. Poor sleep disrupts amyloid clearance and accelerates cognitive decline. alzoc.org

Round-up

The latest research paints a hopeful picture: advances in **AI diagnostics, dopamine-focused treatment, and lifestyle-based prevention** are converging. The overarching message remains clear — staying mentally, socially, and physically active throughout life remains one of the most effective ways to build resilience against dementia.