



Alzheimer's

Scientists should work alongside teachers to help protect children's brains against Alzheimer's disease later in life, according to an Australian geriatrician.

Chris Davis of Brisbane's Prince Charles Hospital said research suggested the better developed a person's brain in adolescence, the lower the risk of developing dementia in later years.

"There's some very good research called the Nun Study where they looked at the language skills of nuns at the time they entered a convent in the United States," Dr Davis said.

"They found the nuns with the better language skills had a lower risk of getting Alzheimer's disease as they got older."

Disturbing figures have suggested the number of Australians suffering Alzheimer's and dementia had increased by 25 per cent in the past two years.

An Access Economics report predicted the number of sufferers would reach a staggering 750,000 in Australia in 50 years.

Dr Davis said obesity, inactivity and smoking increased the risk of dementia in later life.

He advised Australians to delay retirement as long as possible to keep their brains stimulated.

"All our observations in epidemiological terms show that people who remain engaged in society to the fullest extent have a lower prevalence of dementia," Dr Davis said.

He said that as the population aged, Australians needed to break out of the stereotype of people retiring at 65.

"We mustn't forget that when retirement was introduced as a social institution, the average life expectancy was 55 whereas now in Australia we're looking at an average life expectancy of about 80," Dr Davis said.

He will address the International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity in Brisbane.