Study reveals dementia risk in former professional football players – Alzheimer's Society comments

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A study led by the University of Glasgow has revealed the first major insights into lifelong health outcomes in former professional football players.

In findings published today in *The New England Journal of Medicine* researchers compared the causes of death of 7,676 former Scottish male professional football players who were born between 1900 and 1976 against those of more than 23,000 matched individuals from the general population.

The study found that former professional football players had an approximately three and a half times higher rate of death due to neurodegenerative disease than expected.

Dr James Pickett, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Society, said: "This is the longest and largest study on dementia and football to date and clearly shows retired professional footballers are at increased risk of dementia. But, it doesn't say anything about the risk of a Saturday kick about in the park.

"It also doesn't explain why playing professional football might be increasing someone's risk of dementia and more studies looking at changes in the brain will help us do this. There have been changes in the game of football over the decades, for instance heavy leather balls used in the past have been replaced with the lighter latex and plastic ones used today, and the risks for the modern day professional footballer may be different.

"So if you love kicking a ball around with your friends and family after work, don't feel put off – what's good for the heart is good for the head. If you are worried or concerned about your risk of dementia, the Alzheimer's Society Helpline is here to help on 0300 222 1122".

Notes to editors:

- Alzheimer's Society has partnered with the Professional Football Association to provide a dedicated helpline to support members concerned about developing dementia.
- Alzheimer's Society is launching Football United Against Dementia - a campaign in partnership with the industry to ensure everyone connected to the game has access to the support and information they need. To find out more about the campaign, please visit www.alzheimers.org.uk/football
- Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading dementia charity. We provide information and support, fund research, campaign to improve care and create lasting change for people affected by dementia in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Dementia devastates lives. Alzheimer's Society research shows that 850,000 people in the UK have a form of dementia.
- Dementia deaths are rising year on year and 225,000 will develop dementia this year - that's one every three minutes.
- Dementia costs the UK economy over £26 billion per year. This is the equivalent of more than £30,000 per person with dementia.
- Alzheimer's Society funds research into the cause, care, cure and prevention of all types of dementia and has committed to spend at least £150 million on research over the next decade. This includes a £50 million investment in the UK's first dedicated Dementia Research Institute.
- Until the day we find a cure, Alzheimer's Society will be here for anyone affected by dementia - wherever they are, whatever they're going through. Everything we do is informed and inspired by them.
- Let's take on dementia together. Volunteer. Donate. Campaign for change. Whatever you do, unite with us against dementia.
- Alzheimer's Society relies on voluntary donations to continue our vital work. You can donate now by calling 0330 333 0804 or visiting alzheimers.org.uk.
- Alzheimer's Society provides a National Dementia Helpline (0300 222 11 22)
- Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @Alzheimerssoc and Like us on Facebook
- Alzheimer's Society YouTube channel www.youtube.com/AlzheimersSociety

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