

Dr. Willie Stewart's 'Football's Influence on Lifelong outcomes and Dementia risk' (FIELD) research has confirmed that ex-footballers within the study developed neurodegenerative conditions at three and a half times the rate of the general public. The PFA understands these results may be worrying for many of our members. We have prepared this FAQ to help address some of your concerns.

1

What is the FIELD study?

Co-funded by the PFA Charity, the FIELD study is the first peer-reviewed research to determine that having played professional football correlated with an increased rate of dementia within its sample group.

The results showed that the ex-footballers participating in the study had three and a half times the death rate due to neurodegenerative conditions than the control group.

The group of former footballers studied played in Scotland. They were all born between 1900 and 1976. While the research did confirm a correlation, the findings do not definitively establish any specific cause for this link. Further research will be required.

2

Should current players and youth players be worried?

Within the current game, players have improved concussion protocols and improved access to medical facilities, supported by technological advancements. While we hope that this means greater protection for current players, we will need further research to explore whether this is the case.

In the meantime, concussion guidelines and head injury protocols must be reviewed in light of these new findings.

3

What is it about playing football that causes dementia?

We still don't know why the players in this study showed an increased rate of dementia. The study is unable to provide those answers or tell us why some players develop dementia and others don't.

The PFA Charity is currently committed to three other research initiatives in an effort to find out more information. Until we have these results - in light of this new evidence - we will call on medical experts to urgently look at ways to reduce risk.

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Does this mean I'm going to get dementia?

No, these results don't necessarily mean that all football players will develop dementia. Age, genetics, overall health and lifestyle all affect the likelihood of developing dementia in all demographics.

This peer-reviewed research confirms an increased risk in the group of people studied. Of the 7,676 footballers included within the study, 1,180 died over 18 years. 222 of those deaths were due to neurodegenerative diseases.

The way football is played continues to evolve. We don't know exactly how these findings relate to today's players yet. We'll continue to support further research to get a clearer picture of what this means for current players.

For older members who may be concerned - in conjunction with the Alzheimer's Society - we have set up a dementia support line. Our team is available seven days a week to answer your questions.



PFA Dementia Helpline
0800 048 9560

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Why has it taken so long to get this answer?

The PFA began funding dementia-related research in 2001. However, problems with the researchers and the study's logistics prematurely ended the research and delayed the publishing of any findings until 2016.

We acknowledge this was frustrating for those that were awaiting the outcome. It was a frustration for the PFA too. Since then, the PFA has supported three other studies to find out as much information as possible.

The FIELD study only became possible in recent years due to improvements in technology and access to a specific method of data-keeping. To our knowledge, this data management is unique to Scotland, New Zealand and Sweden.

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What about other neurodegenerative conditions like motor neurone disease and Parkinson's disease?

Of the 7,676 footballers, 22 had motor neurone disease and 28 had Parkinson's disease. Though the numbers of study participants with these conditions are smaller than those with dementia, they are still statistically relevant. All the support the PFA Charity has made available to members with dementia is also available to those affected by other neurodegenerative diseases.

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Why don't the PFA cover care home costs in full?

The PFA Charity assists members dealing with dementia through both research and support. This includes financial support to contribute to care, home improvements, respite care, travel costs, support for family members, and more.

All footballers who joined the PFA while playing professional football in England are PFA members for life. This means that covering care home costs for all members in need is not possible for the players' union.

To tackle this, we are calling on all stakeholders in football to create an industry-wide fund to support former players affected by dementia.

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What are the next steps?

A collaborative, international approach is necessary between member organisations, governing bodies and all major stakeholders in football. Together, we must determine how we move forward to ensure footballers are protected.

Further research is vital. The PFA is currently committed to three other studies and will continue to fund more research in the future.

Results will take time, so in the meantime, the international footballing community must look at changes that may help reduce potential risks.



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