Being Mentally and Physically Healthy May Delay But Not Prevent Alzheimer’s Disease

Individuals who keep mentally and physically healthy in middle age may help stave off the symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease, but the activity does not affect the underlying disease changes in the brain for most, according to a study published in *Neurology*.

Researchers evaluated 393 individuals 70 and older without dementia who were part of the Mayo Clinic Study of Aging. Of those, 53 had mild cognitive impairment. Participants were divided into two groups: those with >14 and <14 years of education. Researchers then used magnetic resonance imaging and positron emission tomography scans to look for biomarkers of Alzheimer’s disease and questionnaires to evaluate weekly intellectual and physical activity in middle age.

Education, occupation, and mental and physical activity in middle age seemed to have little effect on the rates of worsening amyloid plaques, brain glucose metabolism, and brain volume. However, for APOE4 gene carriers with high education and continued lifetime learning, there was less amyloid deposition in the brain than in those with high education who did not continue to learn.


Anesthesia Not Linked to Cognitive Decline

New research suggests older patients should not feel reluctant to undergo anesthesia because it may not affect cognitive function. Researchers found no link between anesthesia exposure and cognitive decline after 2 years, according to a new study published in *Anaesthesia*. The study was conducted over a 50-year period and included 24,000 patients aged 70 and older who were evaluated on cognitive function before and after anesthesia exposure.

to have quality-of-life–enhancing surgeries due to concerns that undergoing anesthesia may increase their risk of developing cognitive issues. In a study of >8,500 middle-aged and older adult Danish twins published in *Anesthesiology*, researchers found no clinically significant association between major surgery and general anesthesia with long-term cognitive decline.

Researchers examined the association between exposure to surgery and level of cognitive functioning in a sample of 4,299 middle-aged twins younger than 70 and 4,204 twins 70 and older. Results from cognitive tests of twins who had either major, minor, hip and knee replacement, or other surgery within 18 to 24 years before cognitive examination were compared to cognitive results of a reference group comprising twins who had no surgical procedures. Test results were also compared in an intrapair analysis of twins—one of whom was exposed to surgery while the other was not—to assess genetic and shared environmental confounding.

Twins who underwent major surgery had slightly lower cognitive scores compared to the reference group. However, when compared to their twins, when genetic and shared environmental factors were adjusted, no association was observed. Twins who underwent hip and knee replacement surgery had higher cognitive scores, but the difference was not statistically significant. No differences were found in the minor or other surgery group when compared to the reference group. Researchers also analyzed data for patients who underwent surgery 3 months to 2 years before cognitive examination and found no effect of the short time interval between surgery and cognitive examination on cognitive function.

The results suggest preoperative cognitive functioning and underlying diseases are more important for cognitive functioning in mid- and late life than surgery and anesthesia.


### New Program to Help Improve Quality of Care Provided by Home Health Care Agencies

According to the Institute of Medicine, the number of home health care (HHC) providers qualified to properly care for older adults, including those with dementia, is inadequate. Researchers have developed the Dementia Symptom Management at Home (DSM-H), which is detailed in *Geriatric Nursing*, to help HHC agencies improve the quality of care they provide to patients with dementia and reduce caregiver stress and burnout.

Researchers tested the ability of the program to improve the knowledge, confidence, and attitudes of HHC team members in assessing and managing pain, depression, and other behavioral symptoms in individuals with dementia. They also sought to examine if the DSM-H is a feasible resource to be used by interprofessional HHC teams.

Online interactive education modules were broken into 45- to 90-minute blocks (total training time = 4.5 hours) for ease of learning and to limit interference with work hours, and were designed with a mixture of imagery and text with narrative voice over. Content-specific questions that users had to correctly answer to proceed were included to reinforce the learning objectives of the modules.

Overall, 191 RNs, physical therapists, and occupational therapists saw the DSM-H through to completion, 83 of whom also completed the associated research.


### Participating in Social Activities May Help Older Adults Sleep Better

Older adults who have trouble sleeping could benefit from participating in social activities (particularly religious events), according to a new study in the *Journal of Social Science and Medicine*.

Researchers analyzed two waves of data collected over a 5-year period from the National Social Life, Health and Aging Project, and looked at three aspects of social participation: volunteering, attending religious services, and being part of organized group activities. Data were then compared to sleep outcomes measured by actigraphy (i.e., wearable wrist sleep trackers). Results showed that older adults with greater levels of social participation slept better.

However, despite the strong associations between social participation and sleep, social participation does not necessarily lead to better sleep. The strong associations found could also be because individuals already sleeping well may feel well enough to be more active socially.
survey. There was significant improvement in pain knowledge (5.9%) and confidence (26.5%), depression knowledge (14.8%) and confidence (36.1%), and neuropsychiatric symptom general knowledge (16.8%), intervention knowledge (20.9%), and attitudes (3.4%) and confidence (27.1%).


Updated MyPlate for Older Adults Icon Emphasizes Nutritional Needs

Nutrition scientists at the Jean Mayer U.S. Department of Agriculture Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University, with support from AARP Foundation, introduced an updated MyPlate for Older Adults icon. The updated icon emphasizes the nutritional needs of older adults in a framework of the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The icon and accompanying website can be accessed at http://hnrcac.tufts.edu/myplate.

The plate comprises approximately: 50% fruits and vegetables; 25% grains, many of which are whole grains; and 25% protein-rich foods, such as nuts, beans, fish, lean meat, poultry, and fat-free and low-fat dairy products.

The MyPlate for Older Adults icon also reminds older Americans to stay active by walking, riding a bicycle, swimming, or engaging in another activity. The Dietary Guidelines offers suggestions for older adults who are interested in improving their lifestyle and reducing their risk of disease and disability with regular exercise.


Assisted Living Residents May No Longer Be Mostly Caucasian Individuals

Caucasian individuals are much more likely than African American and Hispanic individuals to consider older adult living communities when they and their parents get older, according to a new Caring.com report.

In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 91% of assisted living residents were Caucasian individuals. Caring.com found 64% of Caucasian individuals would consider placing a parent in an assisted/independent living community versus 37% of African American and Hispanic individuals.

The Caring.com survey also indicated that Hispanic and African American individuals are more open to older adult living communities for themselves than their parents: 49% of Hispanic and 46% of African American individuals would consider living in one of these communities. Caucasian individuals feel similarly for themselves as they do for their parents. 


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