New Clinic Will Treat Epilepsy in Older Adults

Rush University Medical Center launched the first comprehensive epilepsy clinic in Chicago dedicated to treating epilepsy in older adults, serving a population that is often not optimally treated.

Because epilepsy symptoms can be similar to dementia or heart arrhythmias, patients are often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. Currently, one in four newly diagnosed patients with epilepsy is 65 or older, and it is estimated that by 2020, approximately one half of all individuals with epilepsy will be 65 or older.

When an older adult has a seizure, symptoms may include confusion, falls, a nervous tick or repetitive fidgeting, and memory problems. Repeated seizures may cause damage to the hippocampus portion of the brain, which is associated mainly with long-term memory. Risk of having a seizure increases with age and use of certain medications.

The clinic will offer the latest research and diagnostic and treatment options, including individualized medication regimens with access to clinical trials for emerging treatments; access to caregiver support services or groups; systematic cognitive testing; computerized brain mapping; neuromodulatory or surgical therapies; and advanced surgical treatment.


Low Mental Energy May Affect Walking Ability in Older Adults More Than Physical Fatigue

New research regarding the relationship between walking ability and self-reported mood was presented at the American Physiological Society annual meeting at Experimental Biology 2018 in San Diego, with researchers determining that low mental energy may affect walking ability in older adults more than physical fatigue.

Researchers from Clarkson University in New York observed a group of older adults (average age 75) while they performed physically and mentally tiring tasks. Participants performed a physical task—a timed walking test at normal speed for 6 minutes—before and after the cognitive components. Sensors embedded in the 5-meter walking track captured gait speed and stride length. The cognitive portion of the test comprised several math subtraction activities and visually identifying specific numbers and sequences on a computer screen. Participants reported their mood, motivation, and energy levels after the physical and cognitive tests.

The research team used Pearson’s correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between self-reported mood and physical performance. There was no change in gait in relation to mental fatigue in the first 30 seconds of the follow-up walking test. However, walking speed and stride length later in the test period decreased significantly in individuals who reported more cognitive fatigue, but not in response to lagging physical energy levels.


Nicotinamide Riboside May Help Prevent Cognitive Decline

A researcher from the University of Delaware is investigating the impact of nicotinamide riboside (NR)—a form of vitamin B3—on age-related diseases such as mild cognitive disorder and dementia, including its efficacy for boosting nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD+). NAD+, which is involved in most metabolic processes in human cells, is especially important for generating adenosine triphosphate, the body’s primary form of energy, and boosting...
enzymes responsible for protecting cells against stress and damage. NAD+ levels decline as individuals age, which is thought to contribute to broad impairments in older adults’ physiological function, including reductions in blood flow and cognitive abilities. In addition, decline in NAD+ may play a role in increased risk for chronic diseases.

In a study conducted with 24 lean and healthy individuals ages 55 to 79 published in *Nature Communications*, researchers found that supplementation with NR (Niagen®) for 6 weeks boosts blood levels of NAD+ in middle-aged and older adults. In addition, researchers published preliminary data suggesting that NR may lower blood pressure and aortic stiffness—two key risk factors for future development of cardiovascular disease.


**Resistance Training May Reduce Frailty Among Older Women**

Regular physical activity may help older women increase their mobility, but muscle strength and endurance are likely to succumb to the effects of frailty if women have not been doing resistance training, according to a cross-sectional study led by the University at Buffalo published in *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Geriatrics*.

The study examined 46 women across two different age groups, 60 to 74 and 75 to 90, to learn how physical activity affects frailty differently in the two groups. Researchers found a large difference between the two groups in terms of muscle strength and endurance among those who were physically active. With mobility—measured by the length of an individual’s step—and basic functional ability, there was a gap between the two age groups among women who engaged in minimal physical activity. However, that gap disappeared if they engaged in a high level of physical activity.


**Stigma Associated With Alzheimer’s Disease May Prevent Individuals From Seeking Information**

Stigma associated with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) may be an obstacle for individuals to seek information about their risk of developing AD and participate in clinical studies that discover potential therapies, according to a national survey about what beliefs, attitudes, and expectations are most often associated with AD. Survey results are published in *Alzheimer’s & Dementia*.

The study comprised a random sample of 317 adults who were asked to react to a fictional description of an individual with mild-stage AD. The study asked respondents to read a vignette and then complete the survey. Three different assessments were presented for the fictional individual’s condition. Respondents were told the individual’s condition would worsen, improve, or remain unchanged.

More than one half (55%) of respondents expected the individual with mild cognitive impairment or dementia due to AD to face discrimination from employees and exclusion from medical decision-making. Approximately one half expected the individual’s health insurance would be limited due to data in the medical record (47%), a brain imaging result (46%), or genetic test (45%). These numbers increased when participants were informed that the condition of the individual with AD would worsen over time. When told that the fictional individual’s prognosis would improve over time, however, 24% to 41% fewer participants expected the individual to encounter discrimination or exclusion.


**Higher Education Associated With Prescription Opioid Drug Misuse**

The more educated a member of the Baby Boomer generation, the more likely he/she is to misuse prescription opioid drugs, according to new research from the University at Buffalo published in *Nursing Outlook*.

The study, which surveyed 130 participants in western New York, investigated risk factors for prescription opioid drug misuse in adults with chronic pain older than 50. Approximately 35% of participants reported misusing prescription opioid drugs in the past 1 month. The research concluded that individuals who attended at least some college were 2.5 times more likely to misuse opioid drugs than those who did not attend college for this time period. The
study also found that the risk for opioid drug misuse in older adults was approximately 13 times greater for individuals who used illicit drugs than those who did not, and approximately six times greater for individuals with moderate depression. In addition, higher levels of pain that interfered with an individual’s ability to work were a significant predictor of misuse.


Health, Age, and Gender Differences Among Sexually Active Older Adults

Forty percent of individuals between ages 65 and 80 are sexually active, according to findings from the National Poll on Healthy Aging, conducted by the University of Michigan Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation. Approximately three fourths of individuals in this age range have a romantic partner and 54% of those with a partner are sexually active. Whether they have an active sex life, approximately two thirds of older adults say they are interested in sex, and more than one half say sex is important to their quality of life. When asked if they are satisfied with their current sex life, 73% of the nationally representative sample of 1,002 individuals indicated that they were satisfied.

Eighteen percent of older men and 3% of older women say they have taken medication to improve sexual function in the past 2 years. But only 17% of older adults say they have talked with their physician or other health care provider about sexual health in the past 2 years, and most of those who had indicated that they, rather than their physician, brought up the topic.

The poll found differences in sexual activity and interest among health, age, and gender lines. For example, compared with 45% of respondents with excellent, very good, or good health who reported they were sexually active, only 22% of those in fair or poor health were sexually active. In addition, individuals between the ages of 65 and 70 were approximately twice as likely as individuals in their late 70s to be sexually active. One third of individuals in their late 60s said they were extremely or very interested in sex, compared with 19% of those in their 70s. Furthermore, women were less likely than men to be sexually active—31% overall, compared with 51% of men—but were more likely to be satisfied with their sex lives. The biggest gender difference, however, was the percentage of individuals who said they were extremely or very interested in sex. One half of men ages 65 to 80 said they had this level of interest, compared to 12% of women in the same age range.


Music Shows Potential for Alleviating Anxiety in Individuals With Dementia

The salience network of the brain—the network responsible for one’s reaction to music—remains largely unaffected by Alzheimer’s disease (AD). In an article published online in The Journal of Prevention of Alzheimer’s Disease, researchers at the University of Utah Health analyzed this region of the brain, examining the potential for developing music-based treatments to help alleviate anxiety in patients with dementia.

For 3 weeks, researchers helped participants select meaningful songs and trained the patient and caregiver on how to use a portable media player. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, researchers scanned patients to image the regions of the brain that lit up when they listened to 20-second clips of music versus silence. Researchers played eight clips of music from the patient’s music collection, eight clips of the same music played in reverse, and eight blocks of silence.

After comparing images from each scan, researchers found that music activates the brain, causing whole regions to communicate. By listening to the personal soundtrack, the visual network, salience network, executive network, and cerebellar and corticocerebellar network pairs all showed significantly higher functional activity. It remains unclear whether the effects identified in the study persist beyond a brief period of stimulation or whether other areas of memory or mood are enhanced by changes in neural activation and connectivity for the long term.


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