

[IMAGE]

Does High Blood Pressure Contribute to Alzheimer's?

By Editorial Staff

Alzheimer's is the dreaded buzzword these days, particularly with an aging baby boomer population. Could something as straightforward – and in many cases, easily modifiable – as blood pressure be the cause and solution for Alzheimer's? According to research published in *Neurology*, older adults with higher blood pressure are more likely to develop brain lesions and markers associated with Alzheimer's disease.

The study tracked nearly 1,300 older adults until their deaths (average age of passing: 89 years). The higher the study participant's systolic and diastolic blood pressure during the study period, the greater the risk of both brain lesions and "tangles" linked with Alzheimer's. In fact, a mere 13-point difference in systolic BP (the pressure in blood vessels when your heart beats) – 147 instead of the group average of 134 – equated with a 46 percent increased risk of one or more large brain lesions. An eight-point elevation in diastolic BP (blood vessel pressure in between heartbeats) above the group average of 71 was associated with a 28 percent higher risk of developing one or more brain lesions.

In terms of Alzheimer's risk, higher systolic blood pressure in particular during old age increased the risk for a higher number of brain "tangles" that may be an indication of the disease. The National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Institute on Aging describes these "tangles" and their potential role in Alzheimer's disease as follows:

brain - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark "Neurofibrillary tangles are abnormal accumulations of a protein called tau that collect inside neurons. Healthy neurons, in part, are supported internally by structures called microtubules, which help guide nutrients and molecules from the cell body to the axon and dendrites. In healthy neurons, tau normally binds to and stabilizes microtubules. In Alzheimer's disease, however, abnormal chemical changes cause tau to detach from microtubules and stick to other tau molecules, forming threads that eventually join to form tangles inside neurons. These tangles block the neuron's transport system, which harms the synaptic communication between neurons."

So keep your blood pressure in the healthy range with a low-stress, balanced-diet, consistent-exercise lifestyle. Your body *and* brain will thank you for it.

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