

High Blood Pressure and Cholesterol NOW Suspect in Alzheimer's

by Michael S. Goryan, MA, Director of Education, Resources for Continuing Education

High blood pressure and elevated cholesterol are key ingredients in the recipe for heart attack or stroke. New evidence suggests these two factors may also increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease. Finnish researchers have found that individuals with high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol in middle age were more than twice as likely to have Alzheimer's now.

"There are so many people who have higher blood pressure and cholesterol values than they should. That's important not only for the heart, but possibly also for the brain," says Miia Kivipelto, MD, a research fellow in the department of neuroscience and neurology at the University of Kuopio. "The message is to treat hypertension and hypercholesterolemia early."

In the study, published in the *British Medical Journal*, individuals at least 73 years old with high systolic blood pressure or high cholesterol values had a significantly higher risk, nearly double, of developing Alzheimer's disease. In those individuals with both conditions, the risk was three-and-half-times the norm.

How high a blood pressure was a risk factor? Researchers found that a systolic blood pressure of 140 or higher was a risk. For cholesterol a level of over 251 was considered too high and a risk factor that could lead to Alzheimer's. If an individual is found to have BP or cholesterol at these levels or higher should immediately work toward lowering their blood pressure and/or cholesterol to avoid possible risks of developing Alzheimer's disease.

High blood pressure and high cholesterol levels are controllable. Diet, exercise, perhaps medication can help control these two factors. Just losing weight may diminish the risk of Alzheimer's disease. It is believed that when one part of an individual's health is at risk, the whole person is at risk for a myriad of other possible diseases.

In a study, published in the June 13 issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Emmanuel Mignot, MD, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine, found that a genetic variant, ApoE4, which is associated with Alzheimer's, is also associated with sleep apnea—the condition where breathing becomes extremely shallow or stops completely during sleep. Sufferers jolt awake many times a night and feel exhausted during the day. There is a hypothesis that sleep apnea may result from subtle injuries to vessels in the area of the brain that regulates breathing.

Sleep apnea has been linked to both cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's, and ApoE4 to high cholesterol. What's more, he says, "there's evidence suggesting that taking drugs to reduce cholesterol might also reduce the risk of Alzheimer's."



You may want to purchase the *Living Well* Reference Library CD containing printable articles from 1997 to the present, including this article – available at: <http://www.vitalco.net/magazine.htm>

Mignot further stated, "These three things -- sleep-disordered breathing, vascular abnormalities, and Alzheimer's -- are somehow connected." Exactly how they relate is still unclear. It could be that "when we detect sleep apnea, it's an early sign of brain injury that might later lead to Alzheimer's."

© 2005, Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities. All rights reserved. This article may not be reproduced in any manner without permission.

Meeting the Challenges is published quarterly (four times a year) by the Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities, 6296 Rivercrest Drive, Suite K, Riverside, CA. 92507. The Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation organized for the purpose of improving or preserving the independence and dignity of the elderly and persons with disabilities and their families. **The educational programs of the Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities are supported by grants and the charitable contributions of individuals and organizations.** Visit us on the Internet at www.LivingPartnership.org or through *Vital Connections* at www.vitalco.net.



You may want to purchase the *Living Well* Reference Library CD containing printable articles from 1997 to the present, including this article – available at: <http://www.vitalco.net/magazine.htm>