Metabolic syndrome linked to memory loss in older people

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Older people with larger waistlines, high blood pressure and other risk factors that make up metabolic syndrome may be at a higher risk for memory loss, according to a study published in the February 2, 2011, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

Metabolic syndrome was defined as having three or more of the following risk factors: high blood pressure, excess belly fat, higher than normal triglycerides (a type of fat found in the blood), high blood sugar and low high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, or "good" cholesterol. Metabolic syndrome has also been tied to increased risk of heart attack.

For the study, 7,087 people age 65 and older from three French cities were tested for metabolic syndrome. A total of 16 percent of the participants had metabolic syndrome. Participants were given a series of memory and cognitive function tests two and four years later. The tests included a memory test, a test of visual working memory and a test of word fluency.

Researchers found that people who had metabolic syndrome were 20 percent more likely to have cognitive decline on the memory test than those who did not have metabolic syndrome. Those with metabolic syndrome also were 13 percent more likely to have cognitive decline on the visual working memory test compared to those who did not have the syndrome. Specifically, higher triglycerides and low HDL cholesterol

were linked to poorer memory scores; diabetes, but not higher fasting blood sugar, was linked to poorer visual working memory and word fluency scores.

"Our study sheds new light on how metabolic syndrome and the individual factors of the disease may affect cognitive health," said study author Christelle Raffaitin, MD, of the French National Institute of Health Research in Bordeaux, France. "Our results suggest that management of metabolic syndrome may help slow down age-related memory loss, or delay the onset of dementia."

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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