

New approach to screen individuals for early Alzheimer's disease

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With millions of baby boomers entering late adulthood, the number of patients with Alzheimer's disease (AD) is expected to drastically rise over the next several decades.

A team of national researchers, led by Emory University, has developed a rapid screening test to detect mild cognitive impairment (MCI) — often the earliest stage of AD. The findings are published today in the online edition of *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*.

The study shows that the combination of a very brief three-minute cognitive screening test, called the Mini-Cog (MC), with a Functional Activities Questionnaire (FAQ) — administered to a family member or friend — could accurately identify individuals with MCI and undiagnosed dementia.

"Since current medications can only delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease but are not able to reverse its devastating effects, a test like this is key to help individuals detect this devastating disease earlier and maintain a good quality of life for as long as possible," says James Lah, MD, associate professor of neurology, Emory University School of Medicine and lead investigator of the study.

The new screening instrument, referred to as the MC-FAQ, allowed the researchers to correctly classify the 204 participating elderly individuals as cognitively normal, demented, or mildly cognitively impaired with a high degree of accuracy (83 percent). Approximately 30 percent of

participants had MCI and 32 percent were very mildly demented.

According to Lah, screening for MCI is notoriously difficult and typically requires 40-60 minutes or more of formal neuropsychological testing to achieve 80 percent accuracy or higher. Specific accuracy for classifying people as MCI with the MC-FAQ was 74 percent.

"While this may not seem overly impressive, it is quite remarkable for a 3-minute investment," says Lah. "The MC-FAQ is also extremely inexpensive, easy to administer and score, and requires no special training."

The MC portion of the screening consisted of a simple clock drawing task and three-item recall that typically took the research participant less than five minutes to complete. The FAQ was completed by a reliable informant, generally a spouse, other family member or close friend while the research participant was performing other tasks.

Source: Emory University

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