

Education helps against dementia

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Researchers have discovered that education not only delays the early symptoms of dementia, but can also slow down the development of the disease - a finding that could result in faster diagnosis and treatment of dementia, reveals a thesis from the Sahlgrenska Academy at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Previous studies have shown that education offers some degree of protection against the symptoms of disorders of the brain.

“This mechanism has previously been observed at a late stage of the disease, primarily in cases of Alzheimer’s, which is a type of dementia,” says Sindre Rolstad, researcher at the University of Gothenburg. “We wanted to investigate how education affected the disease in the early stages of dementia, known as [mild cognitive impairment](#).”

People with mild cognitive impairment can be affected by a reduction in their ability to think, such as reduced memory and a short attention span.

“We wanted to find out whether highly educated patients with mild cognitive impairment differed in terms of tolerance of the disease from patients with intermediate and low levels of education,” says Rolstad.

By analysing the patients’ spinal fluid, the researchers were able to examine whether there were signs of dementia in the brain.

“Highly educated patients with mild cognitive impairment who went on to develop dementia over the next two years had more signs of disease in their spinal fluid than those with intermediate and low levels of

education,” says Rolstad.

Despite having more disease in the brain, the highly educated patients showed the same symptoms of the disease as their less well educated counterparts. This means that patients with higher levels of education tolerate more disease in the brain.

The researchers also studied patients with mild cognitive impairment who did not go on to develop dementia over the next two years.

“We found that the highly educated patients who did not develop dementia during the course of the study showed signs of better nerve function than those with lower levels of [education](#),” says Rolstad. “This finding means that the highly educated not only tolerate more disease in the brain but also sustain less nerve damage during the early stages of the disease.”

The results indicate that a higher reserve capacity delays the symptoms of dementia and the progress of the disease. This can help the care sector to be more aware of [dementia](#) in highly educated patients, and thus increase the chances of the correct treatment being given.

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