

# High cholesterol in middle age women not a risk factor for Alzheimer's and other dementias

November 10 2010

---

High cholesterol levels in middle age do not appear to increase women's risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia later in life, new Johns Hopkins-led research finds, despite a body of scientific evidence long suggesting a link between the two.

What the study, published online in the journal *Neurology*, does find is that women whose cholesterol levels decline from middle age to old age are at 2.5 times greater risk of developing the memory-wasting diseases than those whose cholesterol stayed the same or increased over the years.

"Our research refutes the notion that high cholesterol in midlife is a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease, at least among women," says Michelle M. Mielke, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and the study's lead author.

Even though Mielke and her colleagues found no link between high middle-age cholesterol levels and dementia risk, Mielke cautions that people still need to watch their cholesterol. [High cholesterol](#) levels are linked to cardiovascular and other diseases. [Cholesterol levels](#) can be kept in check through diet, exercise and medication.

Mielke and her colleagues examined data from the Prospective Population Study of Women, which began in 1968 and consisted of 1,462 Swedish women ages 38 to 60. Follow-ups were conducted at four

intervals across the intervening decades, with the most recent examinations concluding in 2001. As part of the study, the women were given physical exams, heart tests, chest x-rays and blood tests. The group was also surveyed for smoking habits, alcohol and medication use, education and medical history. Throughout the study, body mass index (BMI), a measurement of weight-per-height, and blood pressure were taken. Women were assessed for dementia throughout the 32 years of follow-up between 1968 and 2001. In 2001, 161 of the original group had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, but the youngest group was just reaching age 70.

Despite the advances being made in biomarker and other dementia research, the biggest known risk factor for these neurodegenerative diseases is old age.

Mielke says that later in life, women with slightly higher [body mass index](#), higher levels of cholesterol and higher blood pressure tend to be healthier overall than those whose weight, cholesterol and blood pressure are too low. But it is unclear whether "too low" cholesterol, BMI and [blood pressure](#) are [risk factors](#) for dementia or if they could be signs that dementia is developing, she says. For example, an inadvertent loss of weight often precedes the development of [dementia](#), she says, but the exact cause is unclear.

Provided by Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions

Citation: High cholesterol in middle age women not a risk factor for Alzheimer's and other dementias (2010, November 10) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-11-high-cholesterol-middle-age-women.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--