

High cholesterol and blood pressure in middle age tied to early memory problems

February 21 2011

Middle-age men and women who have cardiovascular issues, such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure, may not only be at risk for heart disease, but for an increased risk of developing early cognitive and memory problems as well. That's according to a study released today that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 63rd Annual Meeting in Honolulu April 9 to April 16, 2011.

For the study, 3,486 men and 1,341 women with an average age of 55 underwent cognitive tests three times over 10 years. The tests measured reasoning, memory, fluency and vocabulary. Participants received a Framingham risk score that is used to predict 10-year risk of a cardiovascular event. It is based on age, sex, HDL cholesterol, total cholesterol, systolic blood pressure and whether they smoked or had diabetes.

The study found people who had higher cardiovascular risk were more likely to have lower cognitive function and a faster rate of overall [cognitive decline](#) compared to those with the lowest risk of heart disease. A 10-percent higher cardiovascular risk was associated with poorer cognitive test scores in all areas except reasoning for men and fluency for women. For example, a 10 percent higher cardiovascular risk was associated with a 2.8 percent lower score in the test of memory for men and a 7.1 percent lower score in the memory test for women.

Higher cardiovascular risk was also associated with a 10-year faster rate of overall cognitive decline in both men and women compared to those

with lower cardiovascular risk.

"Our findings contribute to the mounting evidence for the role of cardiovascular risk factors, such as [high cholesterol](#) and blood pressure, contributing to cognitive problems, starting in middle age," said study author Sara Kaffashian, MSc, with INSERM, the French National Institute of Health & Medical Research in Paris. "The study further demonstrates how these heart disease risk factors can contribute to cognitive decline over a 10-year period."

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

Citation: High cholesterol and blood pressure in middle age tied to early memory problems (2011, February 21) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-02-high-cholesterol-blood-pressure-middle.html>

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