

Memory problems may increase after being hospitalized

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A new study suggests that older people may have an increased risk of problems with memory and thinking abilities after being in the hospital, according to research published in the March 21, 2012, online issue of *Neurology*.

"Our study is timely as the United States population continues to rapidly age and researchers try to identify factors that could reduce [memory](#) and thinking problems in the elderly," said study author Robert S. Wilson, PhD, of Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. "Understanding a possible link to something as common as hospital stays is extremely important."

The study involved 1,870 people over the age of 65 who lived in Chicago and were interviewed every three years for up to 12 years to test their memory and [thinking skills](#). Of those, 1,335 people, or 71 percent, were hospitalized at least once during the study.

On average, elderly people's scores on tests of memory and thinking skills decline slightly as they age. In the study, researchers found that people's overall scores declined twice as fast after a first [hospital stay](#), compared either to their previous rate before the hospital stay or to people who were not admitted to the hospital. On specific tests, the rate of decline after the first hospital stay was more than three times faster on a long-term [memory test](#) and 1.5 times faster on a complex attention test. The results stayed the same even after considering factors such as severe illness, longer hospital stay and older age.

"Further research may help to develop strategies to prevent [medical problems](#) in older people that lead to hospital stays. It could also lead to changes in hospital inpatient and discharge policies," said Wilson.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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