

Heart disease linked with dementia in older postmenopausal women

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Heart disease may put older postmenopausal women at higher risk for decreased brain function such as dementia, according to new research in *Journal of the American Heart Association*.

"Our study provides further new evidence that this relationship (between [heart disease](#) and dementia) does exist, especially among [postmenopausal women](#)," said study author Bernhard Haring, M.D., M.P.H., clinical fellow in the Comprehensive Heart Failure Center and the Department of Internal Medicine I at the University of Würzburg in Germany. "And many different types of heart disease or vascular disease are associated with declining brain function."

Researchers, conducting neurocognitive exams on nearly 6,500 U.S. women ages 65-79 who had healthy [brain function](#) at the start of the study, found:

- Postmenopausal women with heart disease or vascular disease were 29 percent more likely to experience [cognitive decline](#) over time compared with women without heart disease.
- The risk for cognitive decline was approximately double among women who had a heart attack compared with those who had not had a heart attack.
- Women who had heart bypass surgery, carotid endarterectomy (surgical removal of a blockage in a neck artery) or peripheral artery disease were at greater risk for cognitive decline.
- Risk factors such as [high blood pressure](#) and diabetes increased

risk for cognitive decline over time.

- Obesity didn't notably increase cognitive decline in elderly women.

"Women with heart disease—in particular women who have had a heart attack, bypass surgery, heart failure, atrial fibrillation, peripheral vascular disease or carotid endarterectomy—should be monitored by their doctors for potential cognitive decline," Haring said. "It is also very important to adequately manage heart disease risk factors such as high blood pressure and diabetes."

Dementia is an increasingly significant problem in developed countries, so researchers said more study is warranted on how preventing cardiovascular disease may preserve cognitive health.

Provided by American Heart Association

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