

Parkinson's disease: Quickly identifying patients at risk of dementia

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It may now be possible to identify the first-stage Parkinson's patients who will go on to develop dementia, according to a study conducted at the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal by Dr. Oury Monchi, PhD, and his postdoctoral student, Dr. Alexandru Hanganu, MD, PhD, both of whom are affiliated with Université de Montréal. These findings were published in the journal *Brain*.

Although Parkinson's disease is generally associated with motor problems such as trembling or rigidity, people with this disease actually have a six times greater risk of developing [dementia](#) compared to the rest of the "population". In this first longitudinal study in this field, 32 patients in the first stages of Parkinson's disease were followed for 20 months. Some of the patients had mild cognitive impairments while others did not. A control group of 18 healthy people were also followed.

"Using [magnetic resonance imaging](#), we found thinning in certain cortical areas as well as subcortical atrophy in the grey matter of subjects with mild cognitive impairments. Thanks to our longitudinal approach, we were able to observe that this thinning speeds up in conjunction with the increase in cognitive problems," explained Dr. Monchi. This specific brain deterioration combined with the early presence of mild cognitive impairments could serve as markers for the development of dementia.

Dr. Monchi stressed the importance of these findings: "This study opens the door to further research, for example, on medication or on non-pharmacological approaches such as [transcranial magnetic stimulation](#).

It's important for these patients to be identified very quickly before they develop dementia so that a therapeutic approach can be adapted to their specific needs."

An estimated 100,000 Canadians have Parkinson's. It is the second most common neurodegenerative disease after Alzheimer's.

Provided by University of Montreal

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