

# Ability to cope with stress when young may impact cognition in midlife

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Researchers in the US have found that people who struggle to cope with stressful situations in their twenties may have worse memory and thinking skills in their fifties. The research was published in the journal *Neurology* on 2 March 2016.

The team followed 3,126 people over a 25 year period. At the start of the study, all [volunteers](#) (men and women with an average age of 25) completed questionnaires about their hostility levels and their attitude to coping when exposed to repeated stressful events. Two years after the start of the study, everyone taking part completed a memory and thinking skills test. Throughout the study, the researchers measured depressive symptoms in volunteers and also asked whether the volunteers had experienced discrimination. After 25 years, the research team asked the volunteers about their education level and collected information on [cardiovascular risk factors](#), smoking and alcohol consumption. At the end of the study, volunteers completed a second, more comprehensive, memory and thinking skills assessment.

When the team took into account [education level](#), discrimination, depression, cardiovascular health and other factors, they found that people who rated themselves as less good at coping with stressful situations in their 20s had worse memory and thinking skills in their 50s. There was no association between hostility and memory and thinking skills later in life when factors like education, depression and cardiovascular risk factors were taken into account.

Dr Rosa Sancho, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said:

"Many different factors influence a person's memory and thinking skills, and this research suggests that ability to cope with stress could also have an impact. While this research suggests an association between the ability to cope with stressful situations in younger life and worse memory and thinking skills in midlife, there are many factors that could explain this link which need to be explored further. Stress can sometimes make coping with day-to-day tasks more challenging and impact on cognition, but as this study doesn't look at whether volunteers developed dementia, we can't draw conclusions about these personality traits and dementia risk.

"The best current evidence suggests that staying mentally and physically active, eating a healthy diet, keeping blood pressure and cholesterol in check, not smoking and drinking within recommended limits could all help keep the brain healthy as we age."

Provided by Alzheimer's Research UK

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