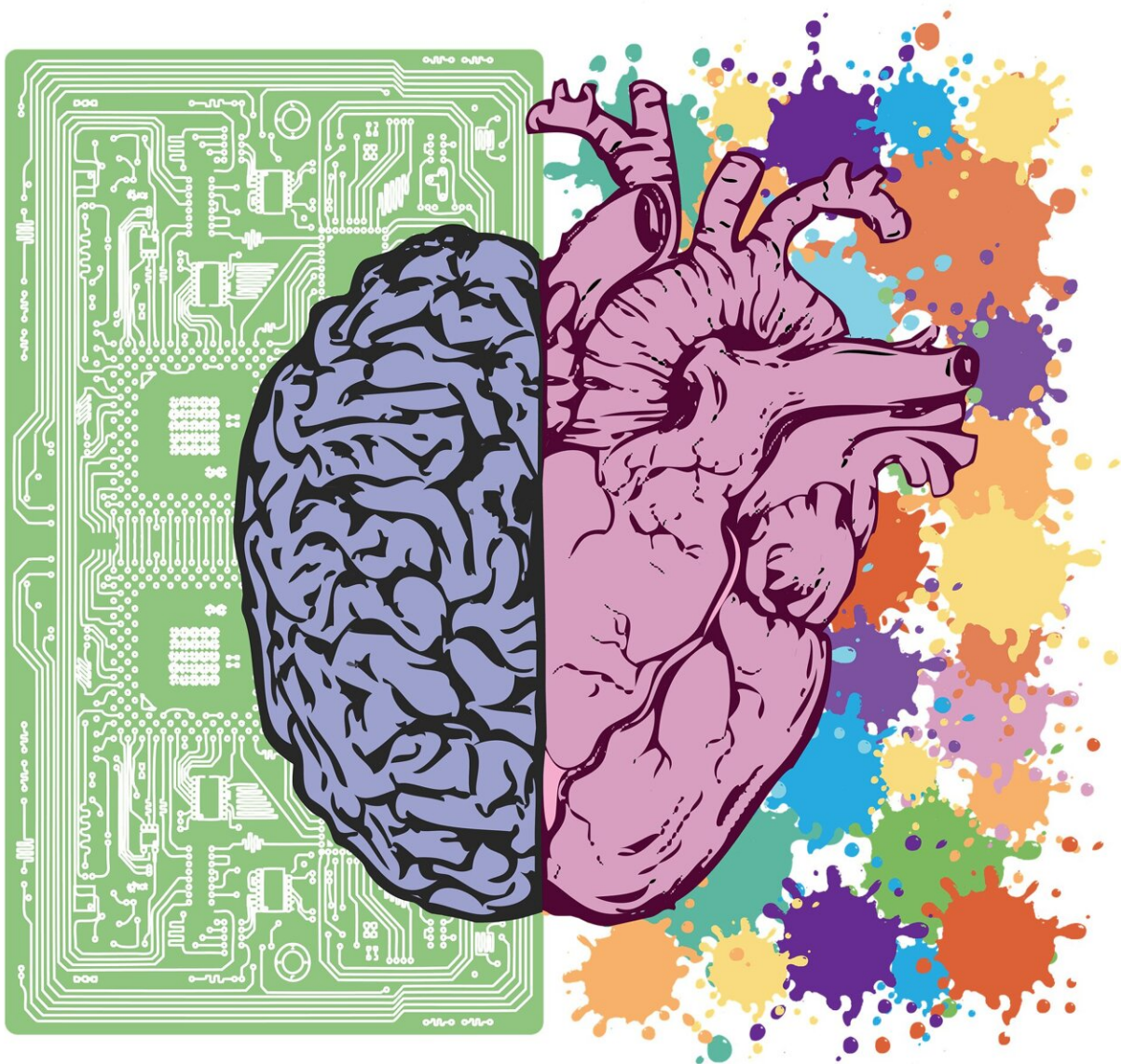


Could fixing a problem with the heart be good for your brain?

April 18 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

People who have an irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation that is treated with a procedure called catheter ablation may have a reduced risk of dementia compared to those who are treated with medication alone. The preliminary study released April 18, 2023, will be presented at the [American Academy of Neurology's 75th Annual Meeting](#) being held in person in Boston and live online from April 22-27, 2023.

Catheter ablation uses radiofrequency through a tube into the heart to destroy small areas of heart tissue that may be causing the abnormal heartbeat.

"Previous studies have found that people with arrhythmias may have long-term thinking and [memory problems](#) due to how this condition may affect the [blood flow](#) to the brain," said Bahadar Srichawla, DO, of University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School in Worcester and a member of the American Academy of Neurology. "Our findings show that treatment with catheter ablation is linked to a reduced risk of cognitive impairment."

The study involved 887 people with an average age of 75 at the start of the study. Of this group, 193 people received catheter ablation.

Participants completed a memory and thinking test at the start of the study, at one year and at two years. This test included questions regarding [short-term memory](#), attention, concentration and language. Scores ranged from zero to 30. Cognitive impairment was defined as a score of 23 or less. People who received catheter ablation had an average score of 25 compared to people who did not receive the procedure with an average score of 23.

After adjusting for factors like [heart disease](#), renal disease, sleep apnea and [atrial fibrillation](#) risk score, those who underwent catheter ablation were 36% less likely to develop cognitive impairment than those who did not receive the procedure and were treated only with medication.

"Our results are encouraging, however there are many factors taken into consideration when [catheter ablation](#) is prescribed," Srichawla added.

"More research is needed to confirm our results."

A limitation of the study was that no tests of blood flow to the brain were recorded.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

Citation: Could fixing a problem with the heart be good for your brain? (2023, April 18)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-04-problem-heart-good-brain.html>

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