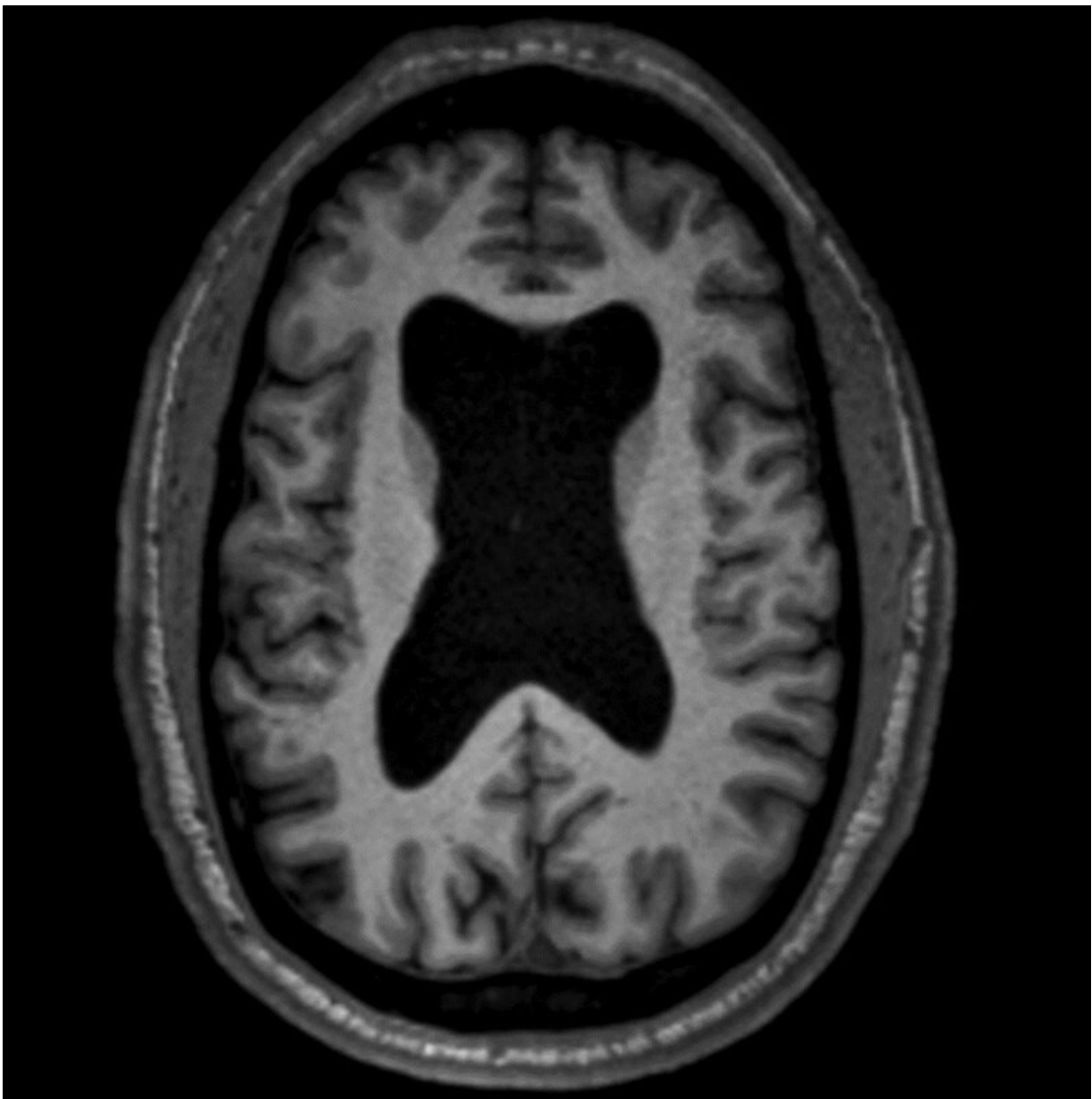


# Former football player's cognitive symptoms improve after case study reveals alternative diagnosis and treatment

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Axial T1-weighted image of the brain, showing relative enlargement of the lateral ventricles, with balloon-like rounding of the frontal horns, suggesting hydrocephalus. Credit: *Current Sports Medicine Reports* (2023). DOI: 10.1249/JSR.0000000000001061

Football players who have had repetitive head trauma and concussion are at heightened risk for chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), an irreversible condition that leads to dementia. But not every case of cognitive decline means CTE, as illustrated by a new case study published by researchers from Mass General Brigham in *Current Sports Medicine Reports*.

In the publication, Adam Tenforde, MD, a physician in Mass General Brigham's Sports medicine program and medical director of the Spaulding National Running Center, co-authored a study that described the case of a 54-year-old former professional football player who was suffering from life-altering cognitive, behavioral and personality changes when he enrolled in the Harvard Football Players Health Study.

As part of the study, which comprehensively assesses each participants' health over the course of a three-day study visit, the participant received a brain MRI. The MRI revealed signs of hydrocephalus—swelling in the brain that can be treated and reversed. After receiving treatment, the participant experienced improvements in mood and cognition.

"We see with this case report that it's important to always be curious as to why an individual experiences a change in function," said Tenforde. "There can be [unconscious bias](#) in how we approach former and current athletes, and those biases can affect care. Providers might assume a

decline in cognition is indicative of a diagnosis or condition that is untreatable. But one of the key findings from our work on this [ongoing study](#) is that when we take a more comprehensive approach, we may find alternative explanations and a treatable diagnosis."

**More information:** Inana Dairi et al, A Case Report of Reversible Cognitive Decline in a Former Professional American-Style Football Player: Findings from the Football Players Health Study In-Person Assessments, *Current Sports Medicine Reports* (2023). [DOI: 10.1249/JSR.0000000000001061](#)

Provided by Mass General Brigham

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