Benefit of thick liquids in Alzheimer disease and dysphagia unclear

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For hospitalized patients with Alzheimer disease and related dementias (ADRD) and dysphagia, those receiving thick liquids are less likely to be intubated but have no difference in hospital mortality compared with those receiving thin liquids, according to a study published online May 6 in JAMA Internal Medicine.

Alexander Makhnevich, M.D., from Northwell in New Hyde Park, New York, and colleagues examined whether a diet of thick versus thin liquids is associated with improved outcomes for hospitalized patients with ADRD and dysphagia. Adults aged 65 years and older with ADRD who were admitted across 11 hospitals in New York between Jan. 1, 2017, and Sept. 20, 2022, with clinical suspicion of dysphagia during hospitalization were included and categorized according to whether at least 75 percent of their hospital diet consisted of a thick or thin liquid diet.

The propensity score-matched analysis included 8,916 patients with ADRD and dysphagia; 4,458 patients receiving a thick liquid diet were matched to 4,458 patients receiving a thin liquid diet. The researchers found that hospital mortality did not differ significantly between the thick and thin liquid groups. Patients receiving thick liquids were less likely to be intubated than those receiving thin liquids; they were also more likely to have respiratory complications.

"Findings of this cohort study highlight the need for prospective studies to assess whether use of thick liquids is associated with improved clinical
outcomes in hospitalized patients with ADRD and dysphagia," the authors write.


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