Rapid weight loss may herald Alzheimer's

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U.S. researchers say the slow, steady weight loss associated with aging may speed up prior to the onset of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

David Johnson and colleagues at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis studied weight loss before the development of dementia in 449 healthy adults. At the beginning of the study and then yearly for an average of six years, participants were assessed for dementia, weighed and asked questions about their medical history.

The researchers found of the 125 participants who developed dementia related to Alzheimer's disease, all weighed about eight pounds less at the beginning of the study than those who did not develop Alzheimer's disease.

In addition, the scientists said acceleration in the rate of weight loss was a harbinger of the change from non-demented status to dementia of the Alzheimer's type.

The study appears in the journal Archives of Neurology.

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