

Obesity link to memory and thinking problems in healthy adults

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Obesity in healthy older adults may be linked to memory and thinking problems, according to research presented at Neuroscience 2014 in Washington DC today (18 November 2014).

Researchers at the Australian National University in Canberra followed 420 cognitively healthy adults aged 60-64 for eight years. The participants' body mass index was measured at the start of the study, and again after four and eight years. At these times, the participants were also given a brain scan to measure the size of a part of the brain called the hippocampus, which is important for learning and memory.

Having a higher body mass index was found to be associated with a smaller hippocampus, and those with a higher BMI at the start of the research experienced greater shrinkage of the hippocampus during the study.

Alzheimer's Society comment:

Dr Doug Brown, Director of Research & Development at Alzheimer's Society, said:

'Although this study didn't look directly at dementia in these participants, the hippocampus is an important area of the brain and is often one of the first areas to be affected in dementia, especially Alzheimer's disease. Understanding ways to improve the health of this crucial brain region could help us reduce the effects of dementia – more research is needed to see if this is the case.

'We know that obesity in mid-life is a risk factor for later dementia, so it's concerning to see it possibly having a direct effect on the brain later in life too. What's good for your heart is good for your head. The best way to reduce the risk of developing dementia is to eat a healthy diet, take regular exercise, maintain a healthy weight and not smoke.'

- Ends -

Research reference: Cherbuin et al, 'Obesity and being overweight is associated with hippocampal atrophy: the path through life study'. Presented at Neuroscience 2014 on Tuesday 18 November 2014

Notes to editors:

225,000 will develop dementia this year, that's one every three minutes

Alzheimer's Society research shows that 850,000 people in the UK will have a form of dementia by 2015. In less than ten years a million people will be living with dementia. This will soar to two million people by 2051

Dementia costs the UK economy over £26 Billion per year. This is the equivalent of more than £30,000 per person with dementia.

Alzheimer's Society champions the rights of people living with dementia and the millions of people who care for them

Alzheimer's Society works in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Alzheimer's Society supports people to live well with dementia today and funds research to find a cure for tomorrow. We rely on voluntary donations to continue our vital work. You can donate now by calling 0845 306 0898 or visiting alzheimers.org.uk

Alzheimer's Society provides a National Dementia Helpline, the number is 0300 222 11 22 or visit alzheimers.org.uk

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