High BMI at age 50 may predict earlier onset of Alzheimer’s

In cognitively normal adults who later go on to develop Alzheimer's disease (AD), being overweight at age 50 may be linked to earlier onset of the disease, reports a paper in *Molecular Psychiatry*. Specifically, the research found that each unit increase in body mass index (BMI) may predict earlier onset of Alzheimer’s disease by approximately 6.7 months.

Previous studies have shown that changes in behaviour, such as dietary and exercise habits, may delay the onset of AD. However, it is unclear how obesity and being overweight in midlife (defined in this study as age 50) may influence the age of onset.

Using data from 1,394 cognitively normal individuals who underwent neuropsychological assessments on average every two years for approximately 14 years, Madhav Thambisetty and colleagues examined the relationship between BMI at midlife and the age of onset of AD. From this group, 142 people developed AD and the authors found that in these individuals a higher midlife BMI was associated with earlier onset of the disease. The authors also found that in a sample of 191 autopsy results, higher BMI at midlife may be associated with a greater degree of Alzheimer’s neuropathology.

The authors note that the current study does not determine the mechanisms which may underlie this effect. Further studies involving larger numbers of people, representing a wider range of midlife BMI values, are required to understand if there is a specific BMI value above which the risk of earlier onset of AD may increase.

ARTICLE DETAILS

DOI: 10.1038/mp.2015.129
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