

Low levels of good cholesterol, bad memory linked

Low levels of high-density lipoproteins (HDL) or 'good' cholesterol may lead to memory loss and dementia later in life, says a study.

Observing 3,673 participants (26.8 percent women) from the Whitehall II study, researchers found that falling levels of HDL or 'good' cholesterol predicted declining memory 60.

Whitehall II, which began in 1985, is a long-term health examination of more than 10,000 British civil servants working in London.

'Memory problems are key in the diagnosis of dementia,' said Archana Singh, co-author of the study with University College London.

'We found that a low level of HDL (good cholesterol) may be a risk factor for memory loss in late midlife. This suggests that low HDL cholesterol might also be a risk factor for dementia.'

The team compared blood-fat and memory data collected in phases 5 (1995) and 7 (2002) of Whitehall II, when the average ages of the study members were 55 and 61 years, respectively.

Researchers measured lipid concentrations in blood samples collected after an eight-hour fast, or at least four hours after a light, fat-free breakfast. They assessed short-term verbal memory using 20 one- or two-syllable words read aloud at two-second intervals. Participants then had two minutes to write down as many of the words as they could remember.

Their main findings are that at age 55, participants with low HDL cholesterol showed a 27 percent increased risk of memory loss when compared to those with high HDL.

At age 60, participants with low HDL had a 53 percent increased risk of memory loss compared to the high HDL group.

These findings were reported in *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology*, the journal of the American Heart Association.

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