

# CAN POOR SLEEP Increase Your Risk of Alzheimer's?

You may already know that not getting enough good sleep can cause daytime sleepiness, an inability to make good decisions, unhealthy food choices, weight gain, depression, high blood pressure, diabetes and a host of other health problems. But could poor sleep increase your risk of Alzheimer's, too? One recent study is pointing us in that direction

## New York University School of Medicine, Rutgers School of Public Health

In this study, published in the journal *Neurology*, researchers at New York University School of Medicine and Rutgers School of Public Health found that sleep apnea can lead to mild cognitive impairment (MCI) nearly 10 years earlier than in those who don't suffer from breathing problems during sleep. And those with sleep apnea were diagnosed with Alzheimer's an average of five years earlier than those without sleep issues.

The team reviewed the medical histories of 2,470 people aged 55 to 90 who had participated in an earlier study designed to look for markers of Alzheimer's disease. They found that sleep apnea was associated with a much quicker decline in cognitive function. But they also found that people who got treatment declined at the same speed as people who didn't have apnea at all. Treatments can include machines that help people breathe better as they sleep (called CPAP devices), dental appliances (for mild cases) and weight loss.

## Can We Prevent Alzheimer's?

There is no evidence that anything can prevent Alzheimer's. But there are some things we can do to help slow memory loss and cognitive impairment. These include improving sleep quality, getting regular exercise, controlling blood pressure, engaging in cognitive training and changing eating habits.

*Improve Sleep Quality:* If you, your sleeping partner or a roommate suspects you have sleep apnea, get tested and follow through with any recommended treatment. Other sleep disruptors include restless leg syndrome, insomnia, jet lag, sleepwalking, night terrors, and stress. If your sleep suffers from any of these, talk to your doctor or a sleep specialist about steps you can take to start getting restful sleep.

*Get regular exercise:* Moderate aerobic exercise, like brisk walking, can have an effect on reducing cognitive impairment later in life. Experts say to aim for 150 minutes a week (30 minutes five times a week). Exercise increases the blood flow to all parts of the body, including the brain, improves physical conditioning and lifts your spirits.

*Engage in cognitive training:* According to Dr. Ronald Peterson, an Alzheimer's expert at the Mayo Clinic, this doesn't mean crossword puzzles or Sudoku, although those won't hurt. Instead, he suggests working on memory improvement techniques, called mnemonic techniques. These can include finding a new way to remember a list of grocery items; figuring a tip in your head instead of using a calculator; using new strategies that will help you process and locate information more quickly and efficiently.

## Conclusion

Alzheimer's is a devastating disease. There is no cure. Therefore, we owe it to ourselves, our families, and those we serve to do everything we can to protect our brains from Alzheimer's for as long as possible and to educate others about how to do so.

If we can be of assistance to you or the seniors you work with, please don't hesitate to reach out.



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