

Black Americans With Diabetes and Hypertension Have Higher Dementia Risk

Health care providers and patients should focus on cardiovascular health as an indicator of dementia risk, a study suggests.

May 13, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

A University of Georgia (UGA) study found that diabetes and high blood pressure, or hypertension, may increase [dementia](#) risk, particularly for Black Americans, according to a [UGA news release](#).

Published in the [Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities](#), the study found that Black Americans with both [diabetes](#) and [hypertension](#) in midlife had higher levels of a dementia-related biomarker more than a decade later.

Overall, Black adults are almost twice as likely as white adults to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, a type of dementia that affects memory, thinking and behavior, according to the [Alzheimer's Association](#). In fact, more than 21% of Black Americans ages 70 and older are living with Alzheimer's.

"This study shows that chronic conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes, especially when combined together, might start damaging the brain earlier than we thought, especially for [Black Americans]," said corresponding study author Rachael Weaver, a graduate student in the UGA Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, in the release.

Findings emphasize the importance of [early detection](#) and intervention to control high blood pressure and diabetes early on, which may help protect Black Americans from brain degeneration and lower their risk for dementia later in life.

Researchers also encourage health care providers to focus more on [cardiovascular health](#) as an indicator of dementia risk, especially among Black Americans.

“This distinction is important because it suggests that strategies aimed at preventing or slowing cognitive decline in Black Americans may need to prioritize prevention and management of vascular diseases beginning in midlife,” said coauthor Mei Ling Ong, PhD, an associate research scientist in the UGA Center for Family Research. “Early intervention for these chronic health conditions could significantly protect brain health and reduce the incidence of neurodegenerative diseases later in life.”

Findings also highlight the need for increased public education about these conditions as well as prevention in high-risk communities. In fact, many of the 250 study participants with cardiovascular issues reported having a low income, and nearly one in five had not graduated from high school.

Researchers hope that by demonstrating the connection between heart and brain health, people will prioritize their health by exercising more, reducing stress, eating healthier and limiting smoking and alcohol intake.

Nearly seven million Americans are living with dementia, and a [study published earlier this year estimates](#) that that number may double by 2060. For Black Americans, this number is expected to triple.

“Health inequities like the ones that we’re exploring are not inevitable,” Weaver said. “They are very systemic, and they’re potentially preventable. Just as crucial as early screening and treatment is the need for change that addresses the structural inequities putting Black Americans at higher risk in the first place.”

To learn more, click [#Dementia](#). There, you’ll see headlines such as “[Risk and Future Burden of Dementia in the United States](#),” “[\\$4.8M Grant to Study Alzheimer’s in Black Adults](#)” and “[Millions of Aging Americans Are Facing Dementia by Themselves](#).”