High Cholesterol Among Certain Very Old Seniors May Not Be All Bad

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Usually having excess amounts of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) in the body is a cause for alarm. But new findings published in Alzheimer's & Dementia suggests that this type of cholesterol is associated with a lower risk of marked cognitive decline in some seniors, reports Medical News Today.

For the assessment, investigators from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City reviewed data on 1,897 participants from the Framingham Heart Study. All participants had healthy cognitive function at the start of the inquiry.

Next, researchers followed up with individuals to determine whether there were any associations between total cholesterol levels and cognitive decline. Scientists measured each person's average total cholesterol at age 40 (midlife), at age 77 (late life) and since age 40; they also calculated whether folks' HDL levels increased or decreased since midlife and whether this linear change slowed down or sped up.

Some scores were linked to a higher risk of marked cognitive decline. But researchers noticed that mentally sharp 85- to 94-year-olds who had high cholesterol levels during midlife had fewer problems remembering, concentrating, learning new things and making key decisions in their everyday lives.

"We don't think high cholesterol is good for cognition at 85, but its presence might help us identify those who are less affected by it," said Jeremy Silverman, PhD, a professor of psychiatry at Icahn and the study's first author.

According to Silverman, scientists want to study very old people with healthy cognitive function so they can identify genes or protective factors that suppress mental decline. In addition, his research team plans to examine other risk factors for losing memory and thinking skills, including blood pressure and body mass index, a measurement of body fat based on height-to-weight ratios.

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