



DEMENTIA RISK IN OLD AGE

Linked To Belly Size In Midlife



A new study by researchers from the United States and Sweden show that having a large belly in midlife increases the risk of having dementia in old age. Overweight and obese people with large bellies having double or triple the risk. In other words, while being overweight and obese was a risk factor, the study showed this was significantly affected by where the weight was carried in midlife.

The study is published in the online issue of the journal *Neurology*, and was conducted by Dr Rachel Whitmer, who is a research scientist at the Kaiser Permanente Division of Research in Oakland, California, and colleagues.

Previous research has linked waist circumference or central obesity and body mass index (BMI) in elderly people to the risk of developing dementia, and it has also shown that having a large abdomen in midlife is linked to higher risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

But this is the first study to show a link between belly fat in midlife and the risk of developing dementia decades later. The researchers explained that the size of the belly at this point is an indicator of the amount of fat tissue that is wrapped around the organs in the abdomen.

Using statistical techniques and adjusting for age, sex, race, education, blood pressure, stroke, and other medical and demographic variables, they examined the links between midlife SAD and dementia incidence.

The study concluded that:

“Central obesity in midlife increases risk of dementia independent of diabetes and cardiovascular co morbidities. Fifty percent of adults have central obesity; therefore, mechanisms linking central obesity to dementia need to be unveiled.”

Whitmer suggested that measuring midlife belly size may be a better indicator of long term disruption of metabolism that leads to dementia than using abdominal size in older people because as people age they lose muscle and bone mass and their belly becomes proportionally larger.

She said this was a disturbing finding, considering that 50 per cent of adult Americans have abdominal obesity.



Dementia is not a specific disease. It is an umbrella term for a group of symptoms caused by a range of brain disorders that prevent people getting on with everyday life such as eating and getting dressed or going shopping. It impairs memory, language, ability to solve problems and control emotions, and can change a person's personality or make them anxious or see things that aren't there.

Alzheimer's disease and stroke are two examples of diseases that can cause dementia. Drugs can slow or improve some of the symptoms but there is no cure.