

As Health Problems Pile Up, So Might The Risk For Dementia In Seniors

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This study analyzed data on 7,239 people, 65 years old and older, who had no cognitive problems at the start of the study. Periodically, their general health was assessed, including whether they had any of 19 health problems, none of which had been linked to dementia. They included arthritis, sinus issues, broken bones, hearing or vision problems, issues with the way dentures fit, stomach troubles and skin problems. After 10 years, 416 people had Alzheimer's, 191 had other types of dementia and 677 had cognitive problems but no dementia. The more problems they had from the list of 19 health issues, the more likely they were to have developed some form of dementia. People with eight health problems had a 30 percent chance of developing dementia, and those with 12 problems had a 40 percent chance, compared with an 18 percent chance for people who had none of the designated problems. The study did not determine whether any of the 19 health problems, separately or combined, were more predictive of dementia than others.

Who may be affected? Older people. Dementia is not a disease in itself but rather a collection of symptoms caused by various disorders that affect the brain. Memory loss and trouble thinking are usually early symptoms; later, mood and personality often change, and the person may have trouble with day-to-day activities. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia in people 65 and older.

Some of the data came from the participants' responses on questionnaires.

This study is published in *Neurology* which is located at www.neurology.org.