

New study connects lack of sleep to Alzheimer's disease

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A new study including work from UW-Madison researchers has established a link between lack of sleep and higher risk for developing Alzheimer's disease.

The study was published online last week in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. The research team, led by UW-Madison scientists, found those getting less sleep in "late midlife" had more early indicators for the disease, such as amyloid plaque — clusters of proteins that lose their normal function and become harmful — as well as signs of inflammation and brain-cell injury.

"Our findings suggest that improving sleep during mid-life could potentially reduce a person's risk of Alzheimer's disease," said Kate Sprecher, neuroscience researcher at UW and one of the leaders of the study. "While it's not the case that everyone with sleep problems will develop Alzheimer's disease, sleep disturbance is a common, treatable issue for many middle-aged Americans."

The study focused on 101 volunteers between the ages of 57 and 69 with "normal" memory. Volunteers answered a questionnaire on sleep, and researchers also studied their cerebrospinal fluid — a clear fluid in the brain and spinal cord that performs several important functions like protecting from impacts and removing waste products from the brain.

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