

Editorial

Anemia Might Increase the Risk for Dementia

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Editor

Older adults suffering from anemia may be at an increased risk for dementia.

Anemia affects as many as 23 percent of seniors, the researchers say. A 60 percent increased risk of dementia has been discovered in the presence of anemia. Even after controlling other factors such as other medical illness, demographics, etc, the risk remains elevated at nearly 40 to 50 percent, and given how common both anemia and dementia are in older adults, more attention to the connection between the two is important. Though a study of more than 2,500 men and women in their 70s doesn't actually prove that anemia causes dementia.

It can be said that anemia is causally related to dementia, but with observational studies one can never say for sure.

The job of the red blood cells is to carry oxygen throughout the body. When you are anemic, less oxygen is delivered to brain cells. Anemia could also indicate poor overall health, the study authors noted. Causes of anemia include iron deficiency and blood loss. Cancer, kidney failure and certain chronic diseases can also lead to anemia.

The study published online July 31 in *Neurology* should remind doctors that many conditions can lead to dementia, and treating them might ward off mental decline, one expert said. "One concern about the increased visibility and prevalence of Alzheimer's disease is that some physicians will be tempted to jump straight to that diagnosis

without first having followed the 'rule out reversible causes' rule." Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. We must always seek to exclude treatable, reversible causes of dementia such as depression, nutritional deficiencies, endocrine disorders and metabolic disorders before rushing into a diagnosis of Alzheimer's.

During the study conducted, all of the participants were tested for anemia and took memory and thinking tests over 11 years. Almost 400 participants were anemic at the study's start. Over the course of the study, about 18 percent of participants — 455 — developed dementia, the researchers found. Of participants with anemia, 23 percent developed dementia, compared with 17 percent of those who weren't anemic. People who were anemic at the study's start had a 41 percent higher risk of developing dementia than those without anemia after the researchers took into account factors such as age, race, sex and education.

For now though, suffice it to say that additional research is needed to confirm this association before recommendations are made regarding dementia prevention. But, nevertheless, we should screen the elderly for anemia, and bring up their nutrition to par, or treat any other causes for the anemia, because as stated previously, Anemia in itself is a disease, indicative of poor overall health.