

A Little-Known Link Between Alzheimer's and Heart Disease

Alzheimer's is a progressive and deadly disease that currently affects as many as 5 million people in the U.S. In fact, 1 in 3 older adults dies from Alzheimer's or another form of dementia.

Alzheimer's disease is now the sixth-leading cause of death for Americans and the most common type of dementia, which is a general term for memory and cognitive loss that interferes with daily life.

Most people don't realize it, but Alzheimer's disease and heart disease share a connection. This connection is actually a common gene known as APOE-4. This gene is found in about 40 percent of those with late-onset Alzheimer's, but only 25-30 percent of the normal population. Scientists know that having the APOE-4 gene raises the risk of developing Alzheimer's but do not yet fully understand how or why that happens.

APOE contains the code for making a protein that carries cholesterol and other fats in the bloodstream. Those with the APOE-4 gene are not only at higher risk for Alzheimer's, but for heart disease as well.

Atherosclerosis, or a buildup of fatty plaques in the heart's coronary arteries, reduces the heart's ability to pump blood throughout the body, including the brain. And since the brain uses as much as 25 percent of the blood pumped by the heart, researchers believe that a reduction in blood flow from atherosclerosis may damage the brain and put it at higher risk for Alzheimer's disease.

The shortage of oxygen resulting from decreased blood flow may also activate the production of amyloid protein plaques found in the brains of those with Alzheimer's. These amyloid plaques

and other accumulated proteins called tau tangles are also associated with the formation of Alzheimer's disease.

Accumulating evidence indicates Alzheimer's may actually be a vascular disease, similar to heart disease or stroke. Following a heart-healthy lifestyle is good for your brain health and your memory.

Dr. Chauncey Crandall is Florida based and one of the most-well known cardiologists in America. His book, *The Simple Heart Cure: The 90-Day Program to Stop and Reverse Heart Disease*, is available online and at book retailers. Connect with Chauncey Crandall, M.D., on LinkedIn.