

New Method of Early Alzheimer's Detection Could Pave Way for Successful Treatment

Scientists think they have found a way to detect the early signs of the most common brain disorder, Alzheimer's, after conducting two recent studies. These studies conclude that eye tests can help identify the 'bio-markers' of this brain disease in the retina and lens of the eye.

These two techniques devised by scientists were able to differentiate between potential Alzheimer's patients and those with no signs of this brain disorder with a high level of accuracy. The researchers who conducted these studies expressed confidence in their findings. They said that although their study is at a very primary stage, they are hopeful that it could be developed into an eye test that could be highly beneficial in identifying people with Alzheimer's.

The head of science at the Alzheimer's Research UK charity, Dr. Simon Ridley, praised the findings of the researchers. He said that it is quite a difficult task identifying symptoms of Alzheimer's in its earlier stage. And by the time the symptoms are developed and identified, the brain has already undergone a lot of damage.

Dr. Ridley added that the development of a cheap, non-invasive eye test will definitely prove to be effective in diagnosing Alzheimer's early, which in turn will help patients receive treatment sooner than they do now. Moreover, the non-invasive eye test for detecting Alzheimer's also will assist in improving clinical trials so that potential treatments for brain disorders have a better chance of success.

The scientists who are planning to develop this eye test for detecting Alzheimer's also will develop other expensive procedures to confirm the presence of a brain disorder after its initial indication. A few such procedures include scans or spinal fluid examinations and PET (positron-emission tomography).

The researcher of one of the studies, Shaun Frost from the Australian science agency the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, said they regard this eye test as an initial examination that could match with what is presently used. Scientists are conducting further studies to prove that these findings are correct. And, if found effective, this eye test could be performed as part of a regular eye checkup. Frost further added that the high-resolution images also will assist in the precise checking of retinal plaques of individuals, and this will work as a potential procedure to observe advancement of the disease and response to treatment.

About The Studies

The researchers based their study on the fact that the human eye is an extension of the brain. Researchers of both studies tried to identify the presence of beta-amyloid protein, which is a major assurance of Alzheimer's disease. Beta amyloid protein is formed as clumps in the brain of an individual suffering from Alzheimer's.

In the study conducted in Australia, curcumin was used, which is an active ingredient of the Asian spice, turmeric. Curcumin is used as a fluorescent marker that attaches with beta-amyloid protein and is shown in the retina. The 40 participants of this study were administered supplements of curcumin. It was then identified in the eye by making use of a novel imaging system. The initial results of the study were amazing. The test was able to effectively spot every participant with Alzheimer's as well as precisely recognize

those shown in the brain through PET imaging.

The other study was conducted by researchers from the U.S. company Cognoptix. Those researches made use of an ointment to apply fluorescent label to beta-amyloid in the lens of the eye. Next, laser scanning was conducted to identify the protein. The study was conducted on 40 participants, some of whom were healthy, while others had Alzheimer's. This procedure was able to identify people with Alzheimer's with approximately 85 percent precision.

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