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Abdominal Fat Boosts Dementia Risk

A potbelly in middle age more than triples the risk of dementia decades later, according to a recent study. “The bottom line is that it’s not only what you weigh, BUT it’s where you carry your weight in midlife,” says Susan Mills-Gray, Nutrition and Health Education Specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

A recent study published in the medical journal *Neurology*, found that those in their 40s with the highest amount of abdominal fat were nearly three times more likely to develop dementia after 70 years of age. This study also found that you didn’t have to be overweight to be at risk, simply having a large abdomen was enough. “This is why using a BMI measurement may not be enough to assess your health risk, because where we store fat is as critical as how much fat we carry,” Mills-Gray shared.

How does abdominal fat effect brain function? While the reason is not conclusive at this time, it may have something to do with how belly fat surrounds the body’s organs and secretes hormones and toxic substances that could disrupt the way the brain functions. Another theory is that the physical presence of belly fat and its compression of abdominal organs could burden the entire body, affecting the brain by increasing blood pressure and cholesterol.

Whatever the cause for the connection, all hope is not lost. Mills-Gray shares, “The type of fat that collects around the waistline is easy to accumulate, but also easy to get rid of with a less calories through cutting back on portion sizes, choosing low fat and sugary foods, and including daily exercise.” So if you’re more apple shaped than pear shaped, it’s time to change the way you eat and get to burning calories through a daily form of exercise you enjoy!

For more information contact your local University of Missouri Extension Center or this faculty member directly at mills-grays@missouri.edu.

Sources: NIH, *Neurology*, Fiona Hayes, *Environmental Nutrition*.