

Risk Factors and Gender Specific Dementia

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Dementia is an increasingly common disease. As women in many countries outlive men, their risk of dementia also rises, as age is the greatest risk factor for dementia. The linkage of risk factors for heart disease, stroke, cognitive impairment, and depression, is particularly important in our approach to the treatment and prevention along the spectrum of these different diseases. The adverse impact of these health problems will affect women in particular, given the steady rise in proportion of the aging population over 75 that will be women. The main risk factors for dementia are age, family history and Apo E status, and the traditional vascular risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes, hypercholesterolemia and atrial fibrillation. Vascular risk factors that are of emerging importance for dementia are hyperhomocysteinemia, metabolic syndrome, obesity, smoking, drinking alcohol, and estrogen use. The gender specific data still is needed as currently most of the information is based on post hoc statistical analyses for women. Future studies in dementia risk factors must out of necessity focus on prospective treatment studies with dementia as a primary outcome. Of all the risk factors cited above, the only risk factors prospectively studied looking at dementia as an outcome measure, are hypertension treatment and estrogen use. Even in these studies, cognition was not a primary outcome measure. In the design of future trials, it is imperative that there be enough women and men of older age groups for appropriate analysis.