

Anxiety symptoms may be early indicator of Alzheimer's disease

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New research suggests that anxiety symptoms in late-middle-aged adults may be an indicator of the earliest stage of Alzheimer's disease.

The [study](#), led by Monash University Turner Institute for Brain and

Mental Health researchers Stephanie Perin and Associate Professor Yen Ying Lim, examined the relationship between symptoms of depression and [anxiety](#), and memory and thinking, in 2657 middle-aged adults.

Higher anxiety was found to be related to poorer attention and memory.

"The observation that anxiety symptoms are related to poorer memory, particularly in late-middle-aged adults, suggests that anxiety may also be an indicator of the earliest stage of Alzheimer's disease, or that it may be related to the development of dementia in some way," Associate Professor Lim said.

Associate Professor Lim said individuals with high depressive and anxiety symptoms also reported more concerns about their own memory and thinking.

"This suggests that subjective concerns about one's own memory and thinking abilities may be related to psychological or mood symptoms, rather than true dysfunction in memory or thinking, at least in middle-aged adults," Associate Professor Lim said.

Associate Professor Lim said the findings suggest that anxiety symptoms in midlife may increase a person's risk of developing dementia later in life.

"Screening for these symptoms may be a means of identifying people experiencing or at risk of [cognitive decline](#)," Associate Professor Lim said.

"More research is needed to understand exactly what is happening in the brain that links depression and [anxiety symptoms](#) to cognitive decline and ultimately, the development of dementia."

The findings were published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*. Associate Professor Lim is now challenging these results further by testing whether improving mood will prevent a decline in memory and thinking in the BetterBrains clinical trial.

More information: Stephanie Perin et al, Elucidating the association between depression, anxiety, and cognition in middle-aged adults: Application of dimensional and categorical approaches, *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2021.10.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.10.007)

Provided by Monash University

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