

April 2020

1. Mild behavioural impairment (MBI) is associated with beta-amyloid accumulation, but not tau or neurodegeneration in cognitively un-impaired older individuals, according to new research from McGill University. The study suggests that an MBI-checklist could potentially serve as a diagnostic tool for Alzheimer's, before the onset of any other symptoms.
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2. Scientific research labs in the UK are turning their neurodegenerative research capabilities into testing for COVID-19, potentially completing up to 25,000 tests per day at a centralised testing centre, using robotic technology and synthetic coronavirus RNA (Ribonucleic acid) sequences.
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3. A large study from researchers at Melbourne's Monash University shows that taking aspirin each day does not reduce the risk of cognitive decline. The study, involving over 19,000 participants, aimed to determine whether aspirin - known to reduce inflammation and minimise blood vessel-narrowing which can lead to heart disease and stroke - could also have benefits to long-term neurological health. The results showed that there was no difference between those who took aspirin and those who took a placebo in the risk of developing mild cognitive impairment or dementia. There was also no difference in the rate of cognitive change over time.
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4. A new study, by researchers from Duke University, suggests that a decreased ability to comprehend basic financial concepts and manage one's financial affairs may be an early sign of Alzheimer's disease. Previously, it was believed that these difficulties would appear much later in the progression of the disease. However, the researchers say after examining the data (financial literacy tests with brain scans that measured levels of protein build up of beta-amyloid plaque) from over 240 participants, they were able to establish an association between increased amyloid accumulation and decreased ability to comprehend basic financial concepts, successfully calculated values and effectively balance an account.
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5. Glial cells (supportive cells in the brain and central nervous system) were previously thought to merely play a binding or insulating role, protecting neurons and providing structure. It is now thought that they may be important in the development of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. Researchers in the UK focused their studies on one type of glial cell, an astrocyte, named for its star-shaped appearance, and found that the architecture of the cerebral cortex is far more complex than previously thought. As Alzheimer's disease progresses, astrocytes can get caught in a feedback loop with microglia, the cells that would usually protect against Alzheimer's by releasing cytokines. This causes inflammation in the glial cells, which makes the microglia become neurotoxic rather than protective.

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6. A new study from the US suggests that medications used for treating blood pressure and cholesterol could also be useful in reducing the risk of some forms of dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease. The researchers found that specific combinations of these drugs could reduce the risk by up to 21% and delay onset, dramatically reducing the burden on patients, caregivers and the health system as a whole.

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7. Despite restrictions and new protocols now in place due to COVID-19, Anavex Life Sciences has announced it will go ahead with its Phase-2 study of people with dementia linked to Parkinson's disease and expects to report its initial findings by June. The study, taking place in Australia, is testing two doses of oral Anavex 2-73 (a middle and high dose) against a placebo for about one year in up to 450 people (ages 60 to 85) with mild cognitive impairment or early stage mild dementia due to Alzheimer's disease. Anavex re-stated its commitment to ensuring the safety of all trial participants and the research will continue to be conducted in line with scientific and ethical guidelines.

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8. Intermittent fasting (IF) has been shown to have positive effects on the liver, immune system, heart, and brain, as well as the body's ability to fight cancer. Now, scientists in Singapore say IF increases neurogenesis (the process by which new neurons are formed in the brain) particularly in the hippocampus. The greatest benefits appear to occur when fasting last for 16 hours - i.e. when the feeding window is restricted to just eight hours a day. It is believed that IF is able to facilitate changes in the metabolic pathways in the brain, which leads to stress resistance capacity of brain cells.

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