Why Minorities May Be at Higher Risk of Alzheimer's and Other Mental Decline

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Older African Americans are nearly twice as likely to have Alzheimer's disease and other dementias than their white counterparts, but many black folks don't know much about how these conditions can devastate black seniors' brains, according to a report published by the Alzheimer's Association.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, which is defined by the loss or decline in memory or other cognitive functions, such as the ability to generate or understand speech, identify or recognize objects or execute motor activities.

In 2010, the Alzheimer's Association supplemented its annual "Alzheimer's Facts and Figures" report with a special focus on race and ethnicity. Looking at a variety of resources, including new Medicare data and statistics from the 2006 Health and Retirement Survey, a panel of scientists determined the proportion of Alzheimer's and other dementias by race and ethnicity.

The findings? African-American seniors were twice as likely to get Alzheimer's or another dementia than whites. Latinos were at least 1.5 times as likely to suffer from dementia. As a result, researchers questioned why minority seniors suffered from these brain conditions in greater numbers.

According to researchers, one reason could be the pervasiveness of high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes among Latinos and African Americans. Why? Because these illnesses are known risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and dementias. Researchers also suggested genetic differences and educational and socio-economic factors might also contribute to the disparities.

To reduce their Alzheimer's risk as much as possible, minorities should try to avoid high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes by making the appropriate lifestyle and nutrition changes. Researchers also recommended Latinos and African Americans watch their seniors for warning signs and dementia symptoms.

This is important because minorities are less likely to have dementias diagnosed by doctors. This means they also get less treatment and assistance for these illnesses.

Click here for 10 Alzheimer’s disease warning signs.

To read about how one program helped African-American seniors fight depression, click here.

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