

High blood pressure may make it difficult for the elderly to think clearly

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Adding another reason for people to watch their blood pressure, a new study from North Carolina State University shows that increased blood pressure in older adults is directly related to decreased cognitive functioning, particularly among seniors with already high blood pressure. This means that stressful situations may make it more difficult for some seniors to think clearly.

Source: North Carolina State University

Dr. Jason Allaire, an assistant professor of psychology at NC State who co-authored the study, explains that study subjects whose average systolic blood pressure was 130 or higher saw a significant decrease in cognitive function when their blood pressure spiked. However, Allaire notes, study subjects whose average blood pressure was low or normal saw no change in their cognitive functioning – even when their blood pressure shot up.

Specifically, Allaire says, the study shows a link between blood pressure spikes in seniors with high blood pressure and a decrease in their inductive reasoning. "Inductive reasoning is important," Allaire says, "because it is essentially the ability to work flexibly with unfamiliar information and find solutions."

Allaire says the findings may indicate that mental stress is partially responsible for the increase in blood pressure – and the corresponding breakdown in cognitive functioning. However, Allaire notes that normal fluctuations in blood pressure likely play a role as well.

The study, which is published in the current issue of *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, examined blood pressure and cognitive functioning test data collected from a cohort of adults aged 60-87 twice daily for 60 days. The lead author is Alyssa A. Gamaldo, a Ph.D. candidate in psychology at NC State. A second co-author is Sarah R. Weatherbee, who is also a Ph.D. candidate in psychology at NC State.

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