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## **Weight Issues in Those with Alzheimer's Disease**

While new research has shown a direct link between midlife weight gain and Alzheimer's disease risk, the issue gets more complicated with age.

A weight gain might signal early stages of the disease while weight loss may mean the patient has entered a different stage.

A little background: Research released in 2015 showed a definitive link between midlife obesity and an earlier onset of Alzheimer's. Those who were obese at age 50 typically had an earlier onset of the disease. Researchers found that those who were obese had brains that looked about 16 years older than their healthier counterparts.

While there is a lot to know about weight gain and loss in seniors, Alzheimer's disease often can send mixed signals.

Those with dementia may lose weight—as they forget to eat. Or they may gain weight—forgetting that they have eaten and consuming too much. Seniors who have not shown signs of dementia may still be at an increased risk for developing Alzheimer's, particularly if they are obese. And that in itself is an issue challenging the healthcare system. According to the National Institutes of Health, about 25 percent of seniors entering a nursing home are obese.

With seniors, though, the key is to look for change. If a senior has significantly gained weight, it might signal an issue. The same could be true if there is a significant weight loss. Most people with dementia lose weight in the later stages, which can affect the immune system and increase the risk of falls. A person in later stages of dementia may have difficulty chewing or swallowing and be more prone to choking. Moderate exercise can help stimulate the appetite, while over-flavoring foods can tempt taste buds. Other studies show that providing the highest caloric meal at the time when the person is most alert is beneficial. Research shows that, for those with dementia, this likely is at breakfast.

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