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Could Gut Bacteria Be Linked to Dementia Risk?



By Amy Norton

HealthDay Reporter

THURSDAY, Jan. 31, 2019 (HealthDay News) -- People with [dementia](#) show a different [makeup](#) in the bacteria dwelling in their guts, a preliminary study finds -- raising questions about whether the "bugs" play some role in the [brain disease](#).

Researchers in Japan found that compared with dementia-free older adults, those with the disease typically had a very different gut "microbiome." The term refers to the trillions of bacteria and other microbes dwelling in the [digestive system](#).

As recent studies have been revealing, those gut bugs do more than aid digestion. They appear to affect a range of bodily functions, from immune defenses to the production of [vitamins](#), anti-inflammatory compounds and even chemicals that relay messages among

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Researchers have also found that the makeup of the [gut microbiome](#) is linked to risks for various conditions, such as [obesity](#), [asthma](#) and [type 1 diabetes](#).

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Those studies do not prove that gut bacteria directly contribute to, or protect against, those diseases, however. And neither does the new study, experts stressed.

The study found only that a group of dementia patients had different gut microbes from dementia-free adults, said Mary Sano, director of the [Alzheimer's Disease Research Center](#) at Mount Sinai in New York City.

"You'd expect to see a lot of differences between those two groups of people," said Sano, who was not involved in the study.

And it's very possible, she said, that the dementia was the cause of the gut differences, not the result. For example, [diet](#) is critical in the makeup of gut bacteria, and people with dementia often

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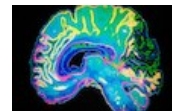
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Keith Fargo is director of scientific programs and outreach for the [Alzheimer's](#) Association. He made the same point.

"At this point, we don't know that this association is causal," said Fargo, who was not involved in the study. "We don't know which came first -- the dementia or the differences in the gut microbiome."

The findings are scheduled to be presented at an American [Stroke](#) Association conference in Honolulu next week. Research reported at meetings should be considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

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