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Blood test for Alzheimer's? Not so fast, says Alzheimer's Association

The results of a recent study that was published in the journal Nature Medicine on Jan. 21 suggest that a blood test may be able to detect Alzheimer's disease as early as 16 years prior to the onset of any clinical symptoms. But while noting that the recent expansion of research into blood-based biomarkers as a tool for early Alzheimer's detection is encouraging, however, the Alzheimer's Association is urging caution in lieu of additional research.

"The study in question, which was led by researchers at the

German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases, found that a blood test can detect levels of a protein in the blood, called neurofilament light chain, or NfL, which might be an early biological marker of Alzheimer's disease," said Yarissa Reyes, vice president of communications for the Alzheimer's Association's Florida region. "The results of the study, however, are only currently relevant to a small portion of those living with Alzheimer's, as all participants were members of the dominantly inherited Alzheimer's disease population, meaning that they possess a rare genetic mutation that predetermines their risk for Alzheimer's."

Weighing in on the study's significance, Dr. Rosemary Laird, a geriatrician and medical director for the AdventHealth Maturing Minds Memory Disorder Clinic, agreed that further research should be conducted before any definitive conclusions are drawn.

"This particular blood test is in the earliest stage of development and is looking at a specific type of Alzheimer's disease known to affect many members of certain families," Laird said. "It is not likely to become widely used for the general public, but may lead researchers to additional discoveries that will help lead development for the more common forms of Alzheimer's disease."

One helpful tool for facilitating research, Laird noted, is the Alzheimer's Association's free TrialMatch service, which matches users with clinical trials they may be eligible for based on user-provided information. The service's database is comprised of more than 250 studies that are currently being conducted across the country and online.

Additionally, while a cure has yet to be discovered for Alzheimer's, Laird added that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can help to significantly reduce one's risk of developing the disease.

"Currently, the best form of prevention remains keeping control of risk factors for cardiovascular disease," she said. "Don't smoke, exercise regularly, consider adopting the principles of the Mediterranean diet, and maintain a healthy

weight and BMI. If you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes, do all you can to keep these conditions under excellent control.

“A final piece of advice follows the old adage, ‘Move it or lose it,’” Laird continued. “If you are retired, don’t retire your brain. Keep engaged in life and connected to your family and community. Your brain will thank you.”

About the Alzheimer’s Association

The Alzheimer’s Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer’s care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer’s disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer’s. Visit www.alz.org or call (800) 272-3900.

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