New Blood Test May Predict Alzheimer's Disease

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If a simple blood test could tell you whether you'd get Alzheimer's, would you take it? That's a provocative question millions may be faced with based on findings from a new experimental study that says blood fat levels may be able to accurately predict whether a healthy person will get the disease, CNN reports.

For the study, researchers at the University of Rochester drew blood from hundreds of healthy people, older than 70 and living near Rochester, New York, or Irvine, California. After five years, 28 of these seniors developed Alzheimer's or its preceding symptoms.

Next, scientists scoured this group's blood fat content and found that all 28 affected patients had low levels of 10 particular lipids. Then researchers confirmed their findings by looking at blood from 54 other Alzheimer's patients who exhibited similarly low lipid levels. (Certain lipid tests predicted with over 90 percent accuracy which patients in a study would get Alzheimer's; the tests also identified the brain-cell killing disease before the subjects reported any symptoms of memory loss or cognitive decline.)

"This is a potential game-changer," said Howard Federoff, MD, PhD, a neurologist at Georgetown University Medical Center, and the study's senior author. That's because today, the only other methods for predicting Alzheimer's are PET scans and spinal taps, which can be expensive, impractical, unreliable and sometimes risky.

Still, doctors would have to be careful about how the predictive test would be used in the real world, Federoff added. Many patients might not want to learn they are on the verge of developing such a devastating, unstoppable disease.

"It's a very personal decision," Federoff said. "Patients and their families would have to be counseled."

As a next step, researchers said they will try out the test on people in their 40s and 50s. If the blood test is still successful, not only would doctors be able to work with their patients to combat and plan for memory loss earlier, but they'd also be able to try out experimental treatments in a group that's almost certain to get the disease. This would speed up Alzheimer's research immensely.

Other studies show that minorities may be at a higher risk of Alzheimer’s and other mental decline. Click here for more information.

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