

Original Research

The Influence of Lifestyle Factors on the Development and Progression of Neurodegenerative Diseases

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Received: 15 December 2024

Accepted: 07 January 2025

ABSTRACT

Background: Neurodegenerative diseases (NDs), such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and multiple sclerosis, represent a growing public health challenge worldwide. While genetic predisposition plays a critical role, lifestyle factors such as diet, physical activity, sleep patterns, and substance use have been increasingly recognized as key contributors to the onset and progression of NDs. Understanding the influence of these modifiable factors can inform preventive and therapeutic strategies.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted on 250 participants aged 40–75 years, including 150 individuals diagnosed with NDs and 100 healthy controls. Data on lifestyle factors were collected using validated questionnaires, dietary recalls, and activity logs. Cognitive and motor functions were assessed using standard neuropsychological tests. Statistical analysis involved logistic regression to identify associations between lifestyle factors and ND risk, and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to evaluate group differences.

Results: Participants with NDs demonstrated significantly lower adherence to a Mediterranean diet (mean adherence score: 5.2 ± 1.3) compared to controls (7.8 ± 1.1 , $p < 0.01$). Regular physical activity was associated with a 35% reduced risk of NDs (OR: 0.65, 95% CI: 0.50–0.85, $p < 0.05$). Sleep disturbances were prevalent in 70% of ND cases compared to 30% in controls ($p < 0.01$). Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption were strongly correlated with disease progression ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: This study highlights the significant influence of modifiable lifestyle factors on the development and progression of NDs. Dietary improvements, regular physical activity, and addressing sleep disturbances may serve as effective interventions to mitigate ND risk. Further longitudinal studies are needed to confirm these associations and guide public health initiatives.

Keywords: Neurodegenerative diseases, lifestyle factors, Mediterranean diet, physical activity, sleep disturbances, smoking, public health.

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INTRODUCTION

Neurodegenerative diseases (NDs) are a group of chronic and progressive disorders characterized by the degeneration of neurons in the central and peripheral nervous systems. Conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and Huntington's disease represent a significant global health burden, particularly in aging populations [1]. While genetic predisposition remains a crucial factor in the pathogenesis of these diseases, accumulating evidence suggests that environmental and lifestyle factors play a pivotal role in modulating their onset and progression [2,3].

Lifestyle factors such as diet, physical activity, sleep hygiene, and substance use have garnered

substantial attention for their potential to influence neurodegenerative processes. For instance, adherence to a Mediterranean diet, rich in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds, has been associated with improved cognitive function and a lower risk of Alzheimer's disease [4]. Regular physical activity has been shown to enhance neuroplasticity and reduce neuroinflammation, offering neuroprotective benefits [5]. Conversely, poor sleep quality, smoking, and excessive alcohol consumption have been implicated in accelerating neuronal damage and cognitive decline [6,7].

Understanding the relationship between these modifiable factors and NDs is critical for developing targeted preventive and therapeutic strategies.

However, most studies focus on individual lifestyle elements, and comprehensive investigations that examine their collective impact are limited. This study aims to evaluate the influence of various lifestyle factors on the development and progression of NDs to inform evidence-based interventions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Population: This cross-sectional study was conducted to evaluate the influence of lifestyle factors on the development and progression of neurodegenerative diseases (NDs). A total of 250 participants, aged 40–75 years, were recruited from outpatient neurology clinics and community health centres. The study population included 150 patients diagnosed with NDs, such as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, or multiple sclerosis, and 100 healthy controls matched for age and sex.

Data Collection: Participants completed a detailed questionnaire covering demographic information, medical history, and lifestyle habits. Dietary patterns were assessed using a validated 7-day food frequency questionnaire (FFQ), with adherence to the Mediterranean diet calculated based on a standardized scoring system. Physical activity levels were evaluated using the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ). Sleep quality was measured using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI), and smoking and alcohol use were recorded through self-reported habits.

Cognitive and Motor Function Assessment: Cognitive function was assessed using the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) for all participants. Motor function was evaluated in patients with Parkinson’s disease using the Unified Parkinson’s Disease Rating Scale (UPDRS). These tools provided standardized and objective measures of neurological function.

Statistical Analysis: All data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 26.0). Descriptive statistics

were used to summarize participant characteristics. Logistic regression was employed to identify associations between lifestyle factors and the risk of NDs. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess group differences in cognitive and motor scores. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

A total of 250 participants were included in the study, comprising 150 individuals diagnosed with neurodegenerative diseases (ND group) and 100 healthy controls (control group). The results revealed significant associations between lifestyle factors and the risk of NDs.

Dietary Patterns: Participants in the ND group had a lower mean adherence score to the Mediterranean diet (5.2 ± 1.3) compared to the control group (7.8 ± 1.1 , $p < 0.001$). The detailed dietary adherence scores for both groups are presented in **Table 1**.

Physical Activity: Regular physical activity was reported by 38% of the ND group compared to 72% of controls ($p < 0.01$). Participants engaging in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity had a 40% lower likelihood of NDs (OR: 0.60, 95% CI: 0.45–0.80) (**Table 2**).

Sleep Quality: Sleep disturbances were significantly more prevalent in the ND group (68%) compared to the control group (29%) ($p < 0.001$). The average PSQI score in the ND group was 9.5 ± 3.1 , indicating poor sleep quality, whereas controls had a mean score of 5.2 ± 2.3 (**Table 3**).

Substance Use: Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption were associated with a higher risk of NDs. Among ND participants, 35% were smokers and 30% reported excessive alcohol use, compared to 10% and 12%, respectively, in the control group ($p < 0.05$). These findings are summarized in **Table 4**.

Table 1: Mediterranean Diet Adherence Scores

Group	Mean Score \pm SD	p-value
ND Group	5.2 ± 1.3	< 0.001
Control Group	7.8 ± 1.1	

Table 2: Physical Activity and Risk of NDs

Group	Regular Physical Activity (%)	OR (95% CI)	p-value
ND Group	38	Reference	
Control Group	72	0.60 (0.45–0.80)	< 0.01

Table 3: Sleep Quality (PSQI Scores)

Group	Mean PSQI Score \pm SD	Prevalence of Sleep Disturbances (%)	p-value
ND Group	9.5 ± 3.1	68	< 0.001
Control Group	5.2 ± 2.3	29	

Table 4: Smoking and Alcohol Use

Lifestyle Factor	ND Group (%)	Control Group (%)	p-value
Smoking	35	10	< 0.05
Excessive Alcohol Use	30	12	< 0.05

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate the critical influence of modifiable lifestyle factors on the development and progression of neurodegenerative diseases (NDs). Our results align with existing literature that highlights diet, physical activity, sleep quality, and substance use as significant determinants of neurological health.

Adherence to the Mediterranean diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats, was significantly lower among individuals with NDs in our study. This finding corroborates prior research that associates Mediterranean diet adherence with reduced oxidative stress and inflammation, both of which are implicated in ND pathogenesis [1,2]. Antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds in the diet may protect against neuronal damage and promote cognitive function [3]. Public health initiatives promoting healthy dietary patterns could serve as a preventive strategy for NDs [4].

Physical activity emerged as another critical factor. Regular engagement in moderate-to-vigorous activity was associated with a 40% lower likelihood of NDs in our cohort. Exercise has been shown to enhance neuroplasticity, increase cerebral blood flow, and reduce neuroinflammation [5]. Our findings align with studies demonstrating the neuroprotective effects of physical activity in delaying the onset of Alzheimer's disease and slowing the progression of Parkinson's disease [6,7]. These results emphasize the need for incorporating exercise programs into clinical and community-based interventions for at-risk populations.

Sleep quality was significantly poorer in the ND group compared to controls. Sleep disturbances, as measured by PSQI scores, were prevalent among participants with NDs, consistent with findings from previous studies [8,9]. Sleep deprivation and fragmented sleep have been linked to the accumulation of beta-amyloid plaques in Alzheimer's disease and neurodegeneration in general [10]. Addressing sleep disorders through behavioral and pharmacological interventions could play a role in mitigating ND risk [11].

Substance use, particularly smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, was strongly associated with ND prevalence in this study. Smoking has been linked to increased oxidative stress and vascular damage, which are critical contributors to neurodegenerative processes [12]. Similarly, excessive alcohol consumption is known to exacerbate neuronal damage and cognitive decline [13]. These findings reinforce the importance of lifestyle modifications, including smoking cessation and responsible alcohol use, in reducing ND risk [14].

Despite the robust associations identified, this study has some limitations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, and self-reported data on lifestyle factors may be subject to recall bias.

Future longitudinal studies with larger sample sizes and objective measures of lifestyle behaviors are warranted to confirm these findings and explore underlying mechanisms [15].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant impact of modifiable lifestyle factors on neurodegenerative diseases. Strategies focusing on dietary improvements, regular physical activity, sleep optimization, and substance use reduction hold promise for preventing and managing NDs. Integrating these findings into public health policies and clinical guidelines could contribute to better neurological health outcomes.

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