



Shrinkage of parts of the brain is associated with a higher risk of cognitive decline and dementia.

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The Cambridge Study found no differences in cognitive skills when participants underwent IQ tests.

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But the men and women will be scanned as they get older, to check for changes which indicate mental decline.

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Human brains naturally shrink with age, but scientists are increasingly recognising that obesity - already linked to conditions such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease - may also affect the onset and progression of brain ageing.

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In the study of people aged between 20 and 87, researchers looked at the impact of obesity on brain structure across the adult lifespan.

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Researchers divided the groups into two categories: lean and overweight, depending on whether their BMI was above or below 25.

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They found striking differences in the volume of white matter. Overweight individuals had a widespread reduction in white matter compared with lean people.

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The team then calculated how white matter volume related to age across the two groups. They discovered that an overweight person at 50 had a comparable white matter volume to a lean person aged 60.

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Researchers only observed these differences from middle-age onwards, suggesting that brains may be particularly vulnerable during this period of ageing.

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Candidates were recruited by the Cambridge Centre for Ageing and Neuroscience and the results are published in the journal *Neurobiology of Aging*.

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