

**3. Burgenländische PsySoMed Tagung
9. Oktober 2010, Eisenstadt**

Altern ist kein Schicksal?

**Zur Plastizität des alternden Gehirns unter
besonderer Berücksichtigung der
Demenzprävention**



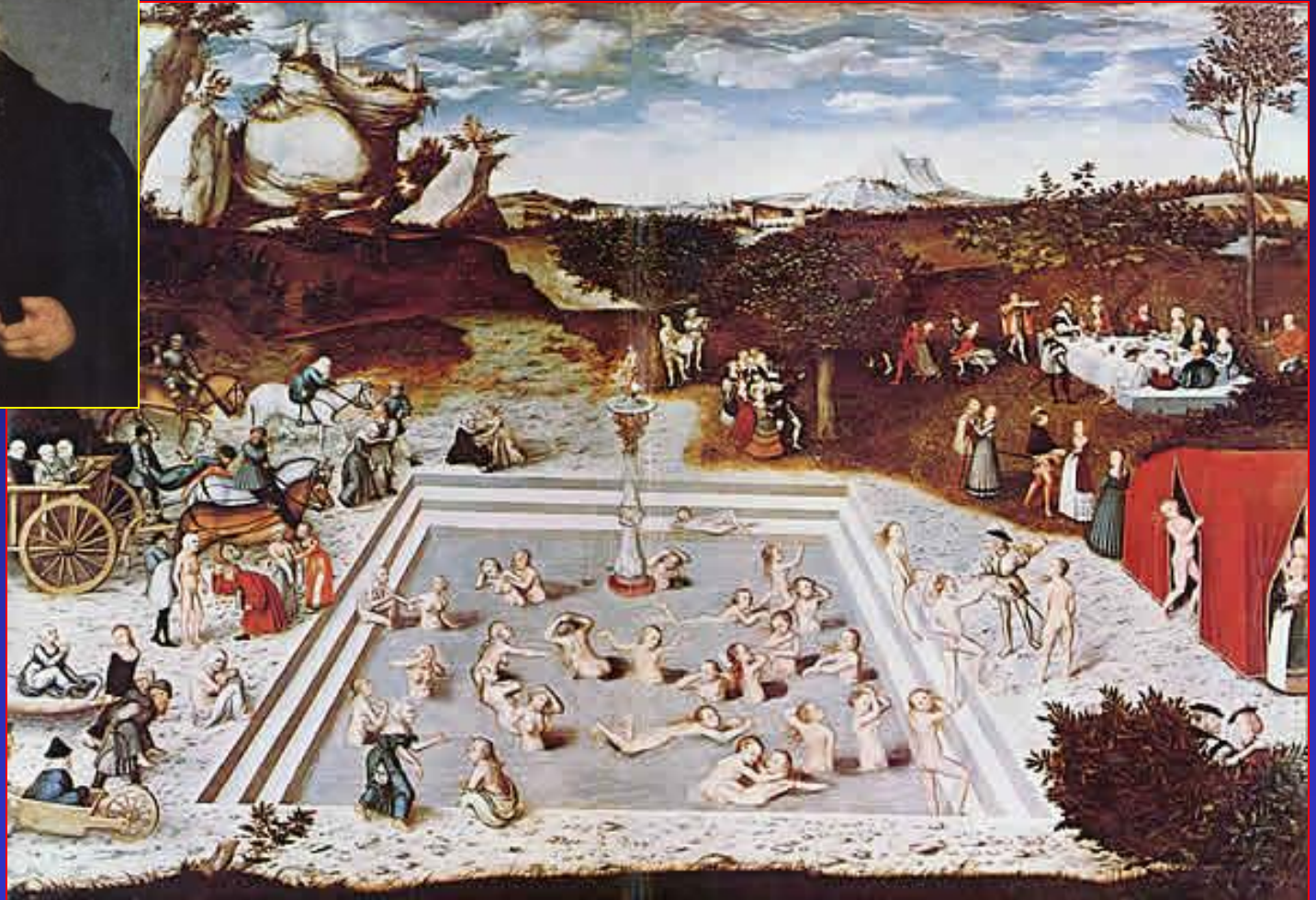
Prof. Dr. med. Johannes Pantel

Klinik für

Psychiatrie, Psychosomatik und Psychotherapie

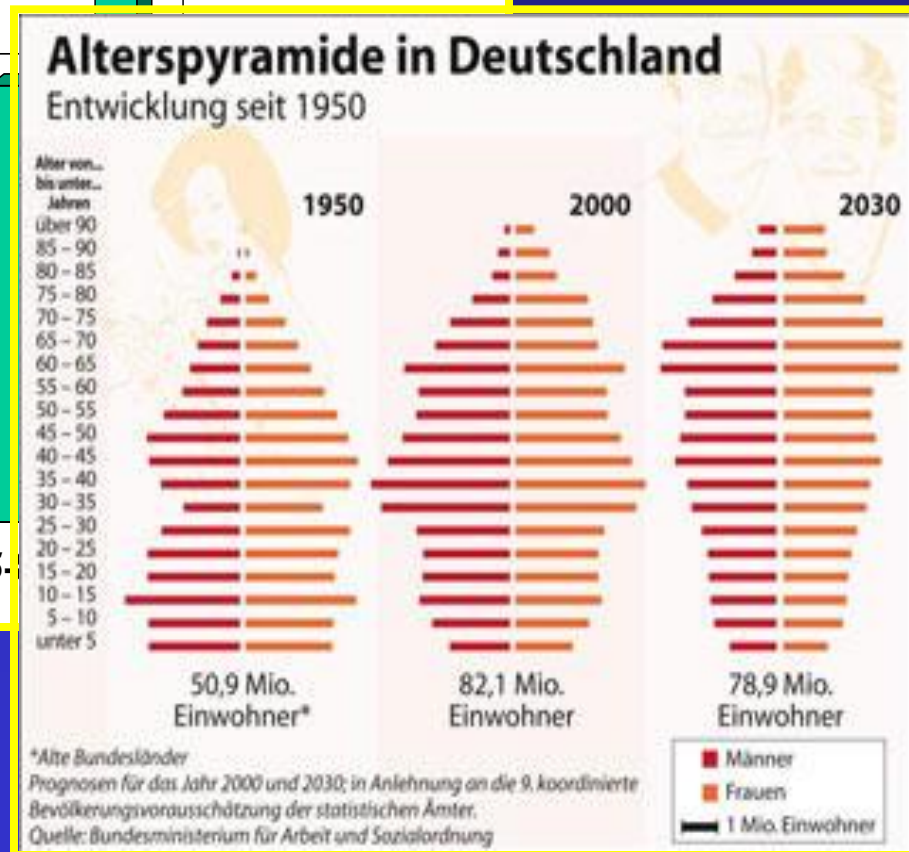
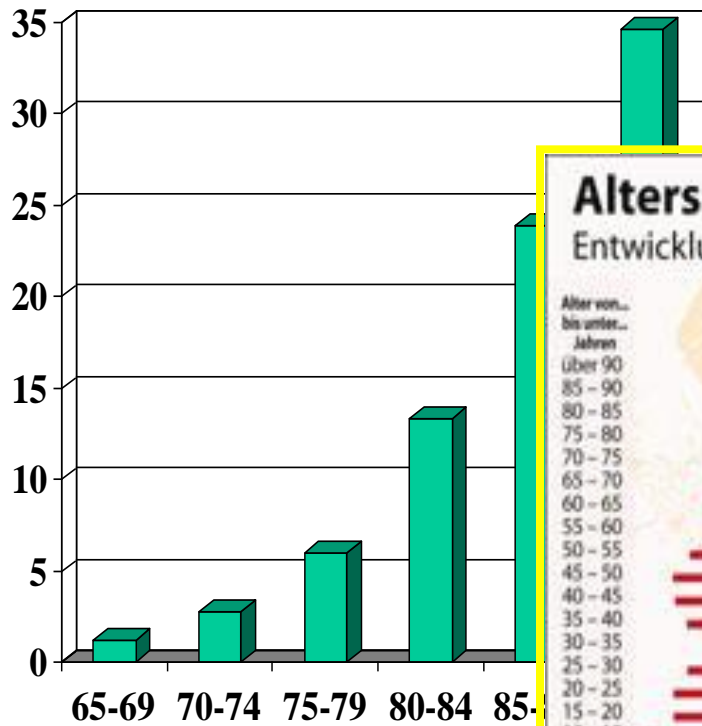
Professur Gerontopsychiatrie

Zentrum der Psychiatrie Universitätsklinikum Frankfurt a.M.



„Der Jungbrunnen“, Lucas Cranach 1546

Prävalenz der Demenz in Deutschland in Abhängigkeit vom Lebensalter (nach Bickel, 1999)



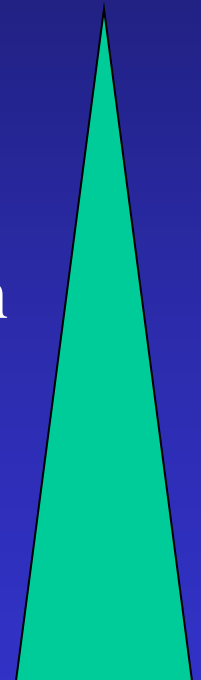
Die Wissenschaft hat festgestellt...

„XY schützt vor Alzheimer!“

Quellen der Evidenz

- Experimentelle *in vitro* Studien
- Experimentelle *in vivo* Studien (u.a. transgene Tiere)
- Retrospektive Studien und Fall-Kontroll Studien
- Prospektive Beobachtungsstudien (Kohortenstudien)
- Interventionsstudien

Grad der Evidenz



Interdisziplinäre Längsschnittstudie des Erwachsenenalters (ILSE)

- Stichprobe aus der Allgemeinbevölkerung, $n=2 \times 500$
Raum Heidelberg + Leipzig
- Rekrutierung über die Einwohnermeldeämter
Geburtsjahrgänge 1930/32
1950/52

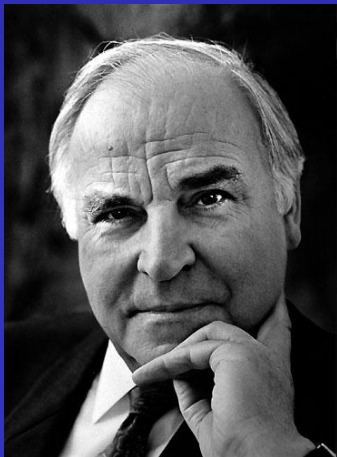
1. Untersuchung

2. Untersuchung

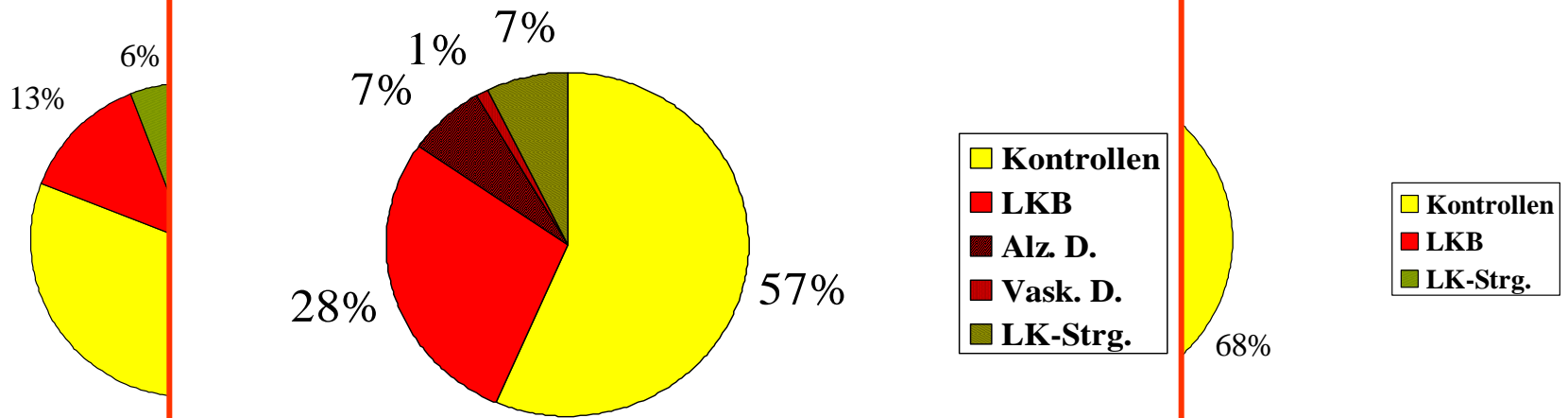
3. Untersuchung

MRT

MRT



Prävalenz der kognitiven Beeinträchtigung in der ILSE



Erstuntersuchung

4-Jahresverlauf

12-Jahresverlauf

n=449

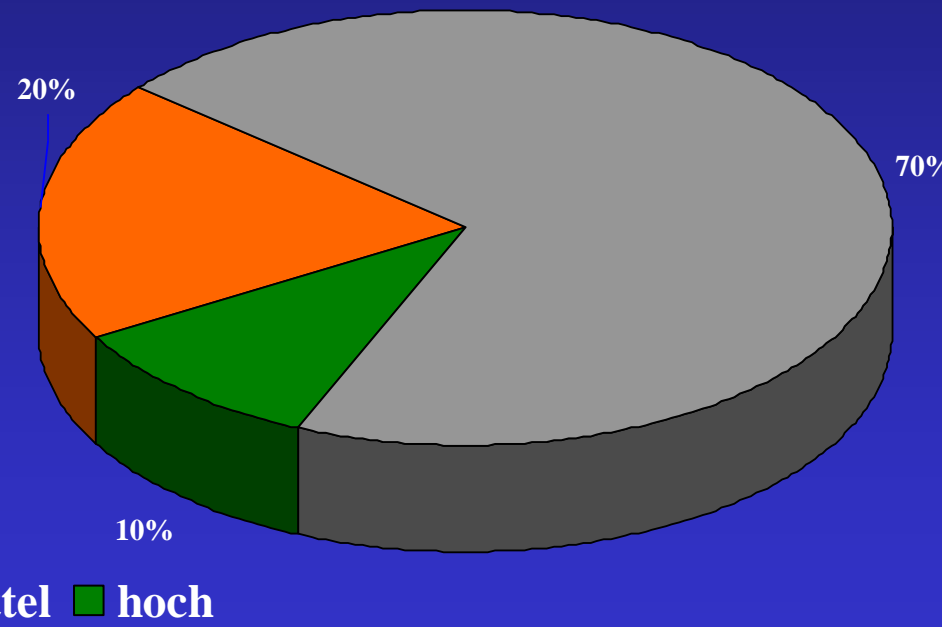
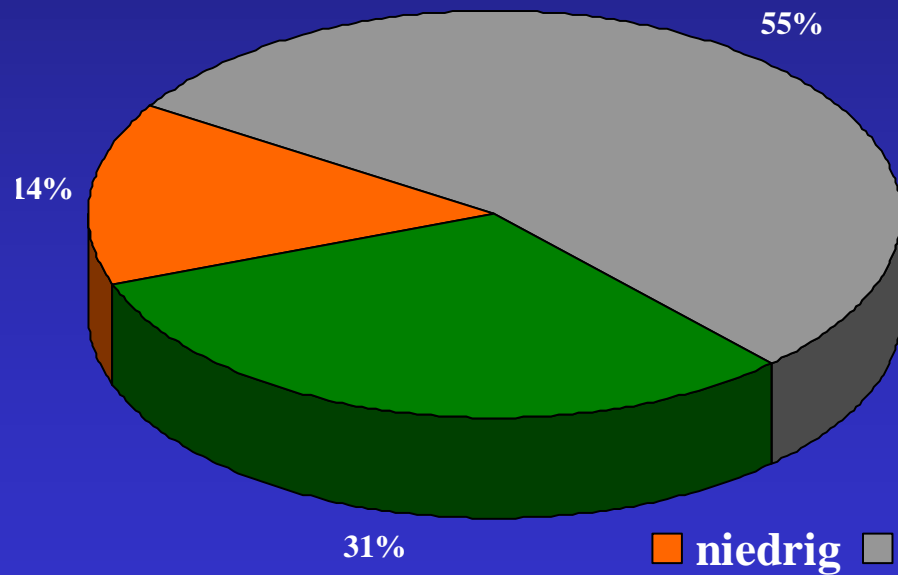
n=381

Schulabschluss

Ergebnisse der ILSE

Kontrollen

MCI/AACD & AD



■ niedrig ■ mittel ■ hoch

$\chi^2 = 19.85$ ($p < 0.01$)



Published online: 10 August 2004; | doi:10.1038/news04809-3

Alzheimer's linked to lowbrow jobs

Michael Hopkin

Mentally stimulating careers may protect against dementia.

A mentally stimulating career may help to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease, research suggests. According to a study carried out in the United States, those who develop the debilitating form of dementia are more likely to have had jobs that do not tax the brain.

The discovery lends weight to the 'use it or lose it' theory, says Kathleen Smyth of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, who led the research. Experts have previously suggested that keeping the mind active, through reading or crossword puzzles, can help to stave off dementia in old age.

The latest work, however, shows that mental stimulation throughout life can influence the development of Alzheimer's. The



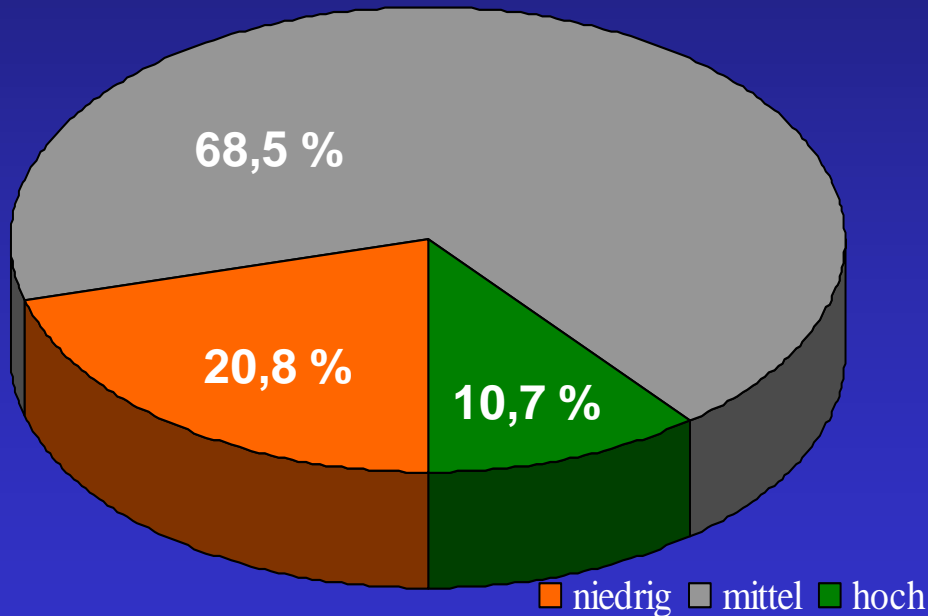
Mundane jobs may contribute to Alzheimer's.

© Punchstock

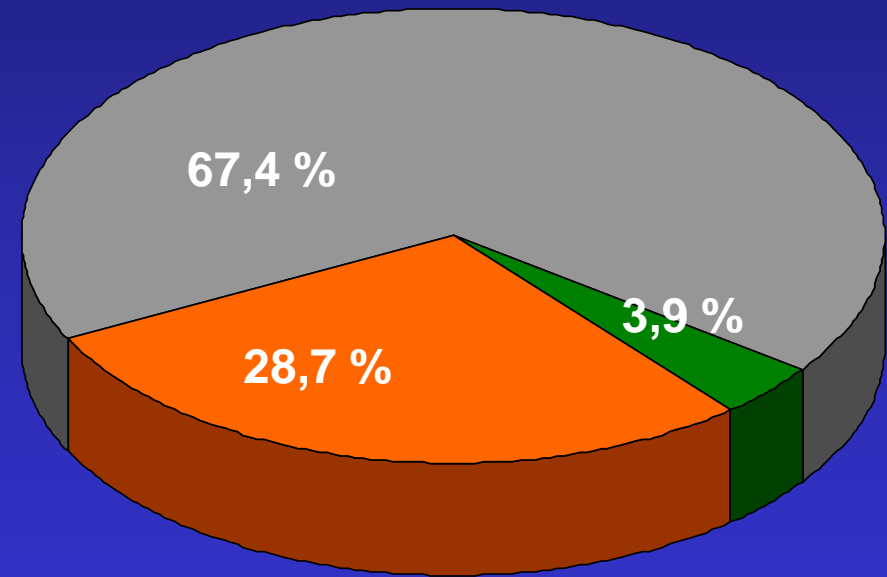
Smyth et al.,
Neurology 2004

Einfluss von kognitiver Freizeitaktivität (ILSE-t1)

Kontrollen



LKB + AD



$\chi^2 = 6.07$ ($p < 0.05$)

(OR=0.23, 95 % CI 0.06-0.81, $p < 0.05$)



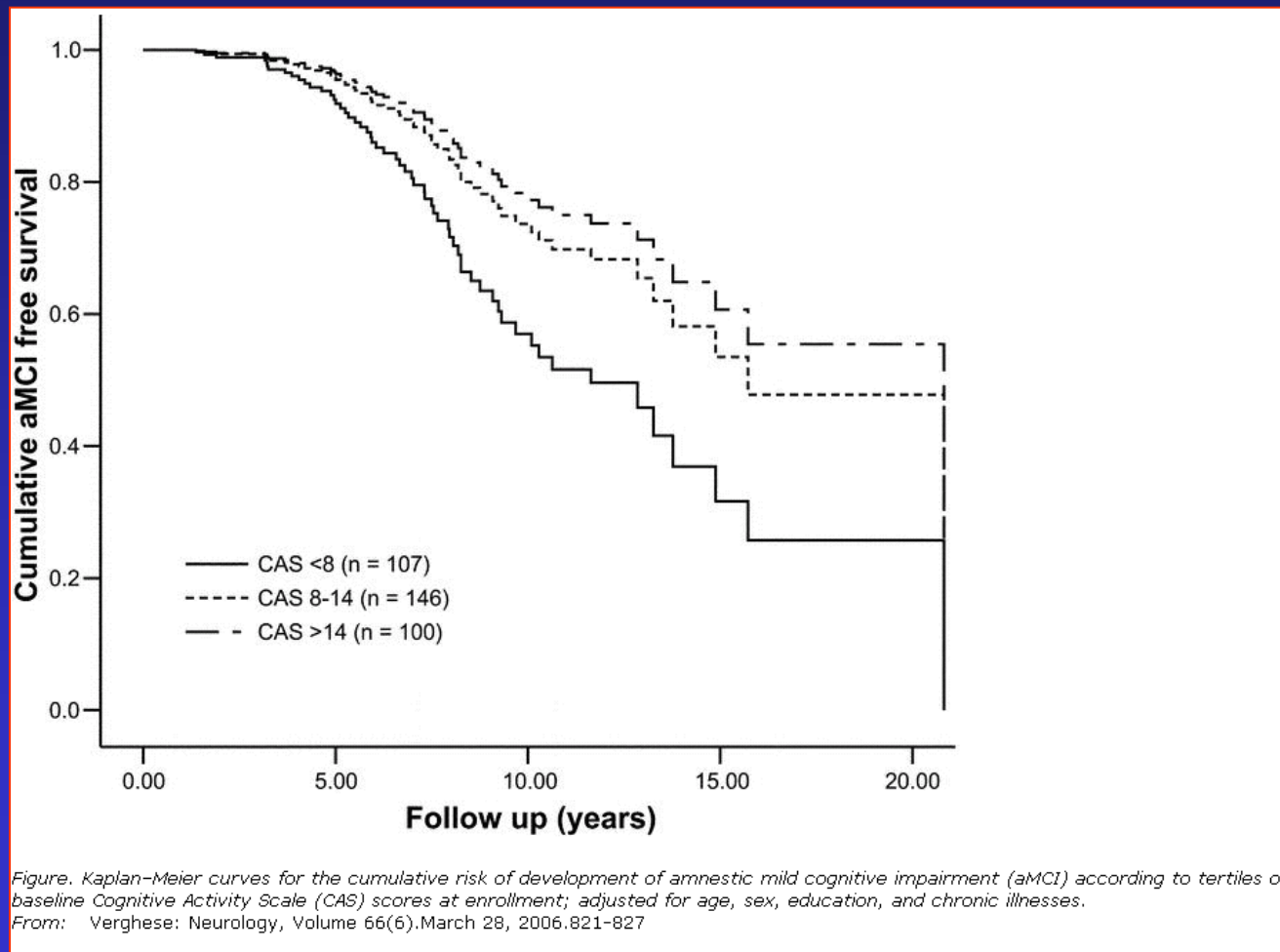
Leisure activities and the risk of amnestic mild cognitive impairment in the elderly

J. Verghese, MD; A. LeValley, MA; C. Derby, PhD; G. Kuslansky, PhD; M. Katz, MPH; C. Hall, PhD; H. Buschke, MD; and R.B. Lipton, MD

Abstract—Objective: To study the influence of leisure activity participation on risk of development of amnestic mild cognitive impairment (aMCI). **Methods:** The authors examined the relationship between baseline level of participation in leisure activities and risk of aMCI in a prospective cohort of 437 community-residing subjects older than 75 years, initially free of dementia or aMCI, using Cox analysis adjusted for age, sex, education, and chronic illnesses. The authors derived Cognitive and Physical Activity Scales based on frequency of participation in individual activities. **Results:** Over a median follow-up of 5.6 years, 58 subjects had development of aMCI. A one-point increase on the Cognitive (hazard ratio [HR] 0.95, 95% CI 0.91 to 0.99) but not Physical Activities Scale (HR 0.97, 95% CI 0.93 to 1.01) was associated with lower risk of aMCI. Subjects with Cognitive Activity scores in the highest (HR 0.46, 95% CI 0.24 to 0.91) and middle thirds (HR 0.52, 95% CI 0.29 to 0.96) had a lower risk of aMCI compared with subjects in the lowest third. The association persisted even after excluding subjects who converted to dementia within 2 years of meeting criteria for aMCI. **Conclusions:** Cognitive activity participation is associated with lower risk of development of amnestic mild cognitive impairment, even after excluding individuals at early stages of dementia.

NEUROLOGY 2006;66:821–827

Kognitive Aktivität und Risiko der leichten kognitiven Beeinträchtigung





The relation of cognitive activity to risk of developing Alzheimer's disease

R.S. Wilson, PhD
P.A. Scherr, PhD, ScD
J.A. Schneider, MD
Y. Tang, PhD
D.A. Bennett, MD

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Dr. Robert S. Wilson, Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center, Rush University Medical Center, 600 South Paulina, Suite 1038, Chicago, IL 60612
rwilson@rush.edu

ABSTRACT

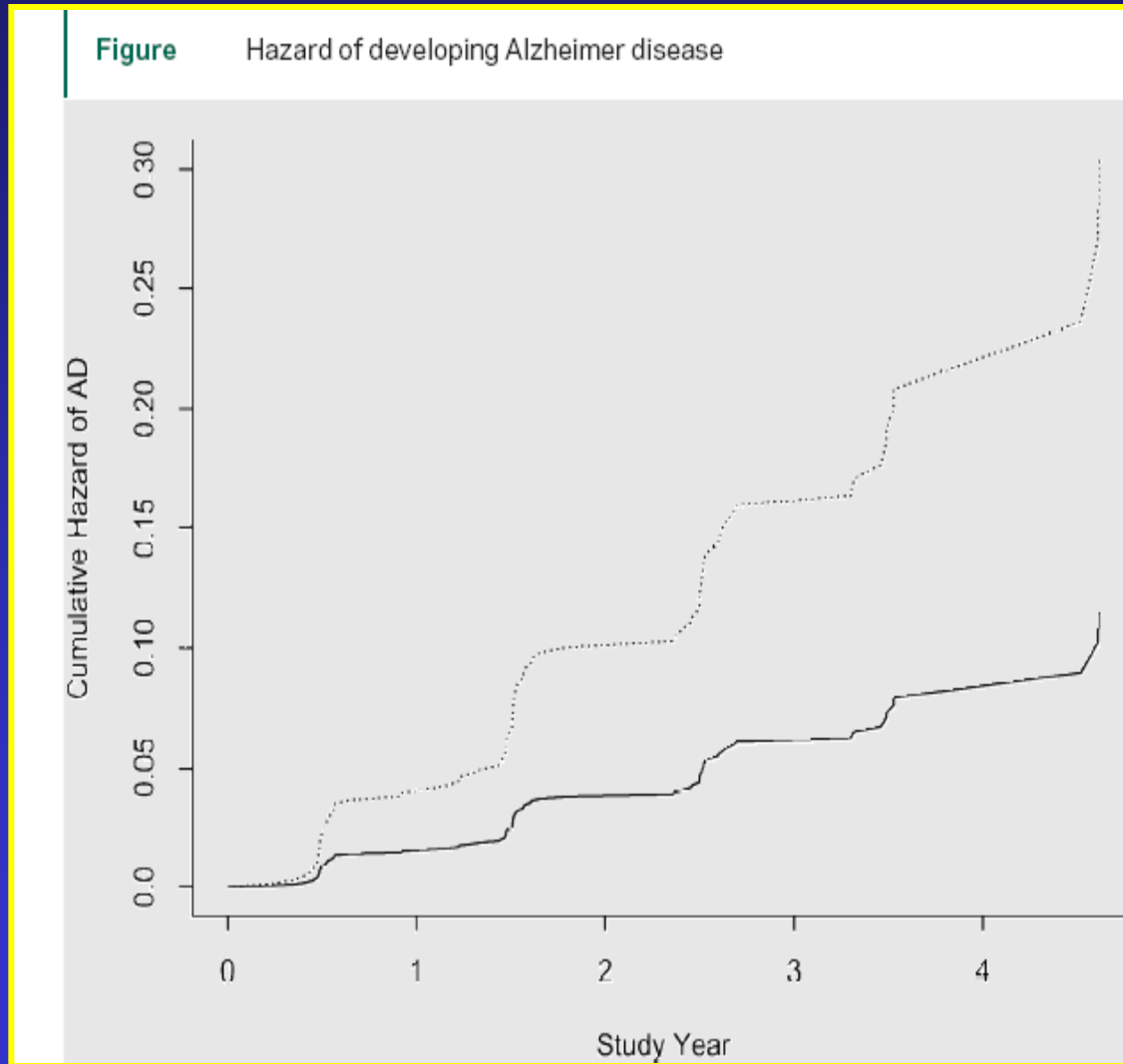
Background: Frequent cognitive activity in old age has been associated with reduced risk of Alzheimer disease (AD), but the basis of the association is uncertain.

Methods: More than 700 old people underwent annual clinical evaluations for up to 5 years. At baseline, they rated current and past frequency of cognitive activity with the current activity measure administered annually thereafter. Those who died underwent a uniform postmortem examination of the brain. Amyloid burden, density of tangles, and presence of Lewy bodies were assessed in eight brain regions and the number of chronic cerebral infarctions was noted.

Results: During follow-up, 90 people developed AD. More frequent participation in cognitive activity was associated with reduced incidence of AD (HR = 0.58; 95% CI: 0.44, 0.77); a cognitively inactive person (score = 2.2, 10th percentile) was 2.6 times more likely to develop AD than a cognitively active person (score = 4.0, 90th percentile). The association remained after controlling for past cognitive activity, lifespan socioeconomic status, current social and physical activity, and low baseline cognitive function. Frequent cognitive activity was also associated with reduced incidence of mild cognitive impairment and less rapid decline in cognitive function. Among 102 persons who died and had a brain autopsy, neither global nor regionally specific measures of neuropathology were related to level of cognitive activity before the study, at study onset, or during the course of the study.

Conclusion: Level of cognitively stimulating activity in old age is related to risk of developing dementia. *Neurology*® 2007;69:1-1

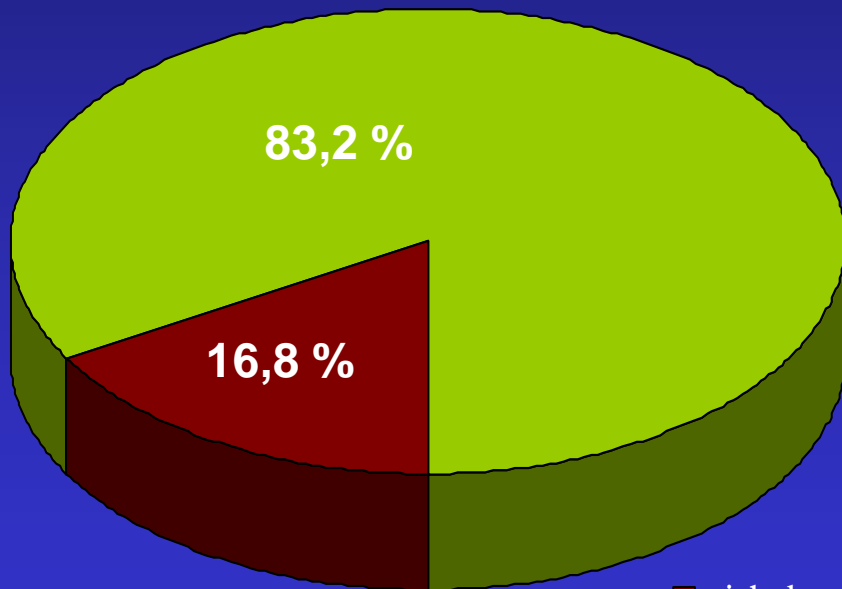
Kognitive Aktivität und Risiko der Alzheimer Demenz (5 Jahre prospektiv)



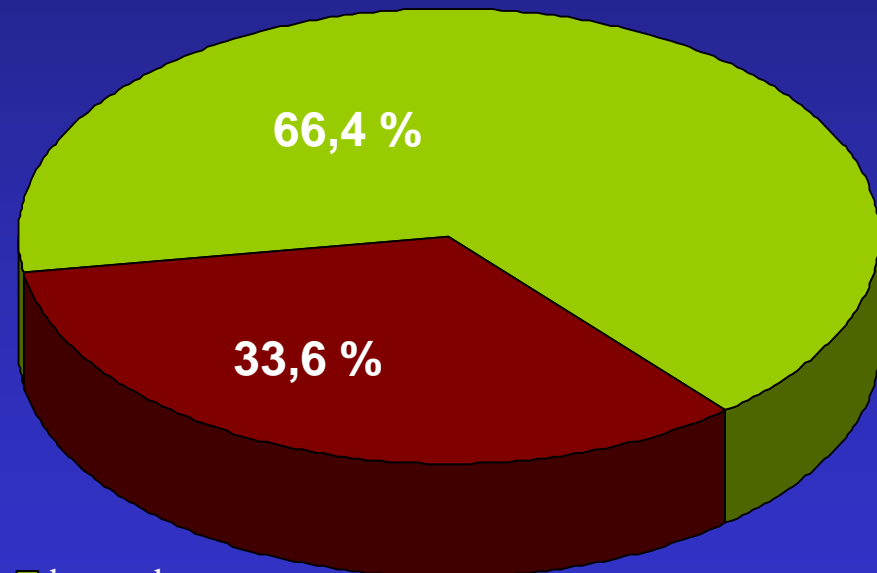
Wilson et al.
Neurology 2007

Einfluss von körperlicher Fitness (Einbeinstand: ILSE-t1)

Kontrollen



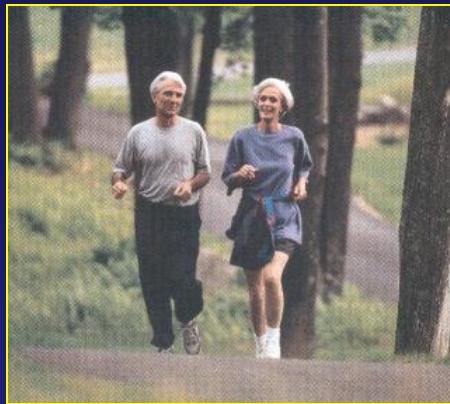
LKB + AD



■ nicht bestanden ■ bestanden

$\chi^2 = 10.51$ ($p < 0.001$)

(OR=0.40, 95% CI 0.23-0.70 , $p < 0.01$)



Körperliche Aktivität und Risiko der Alzheimer-Demenz

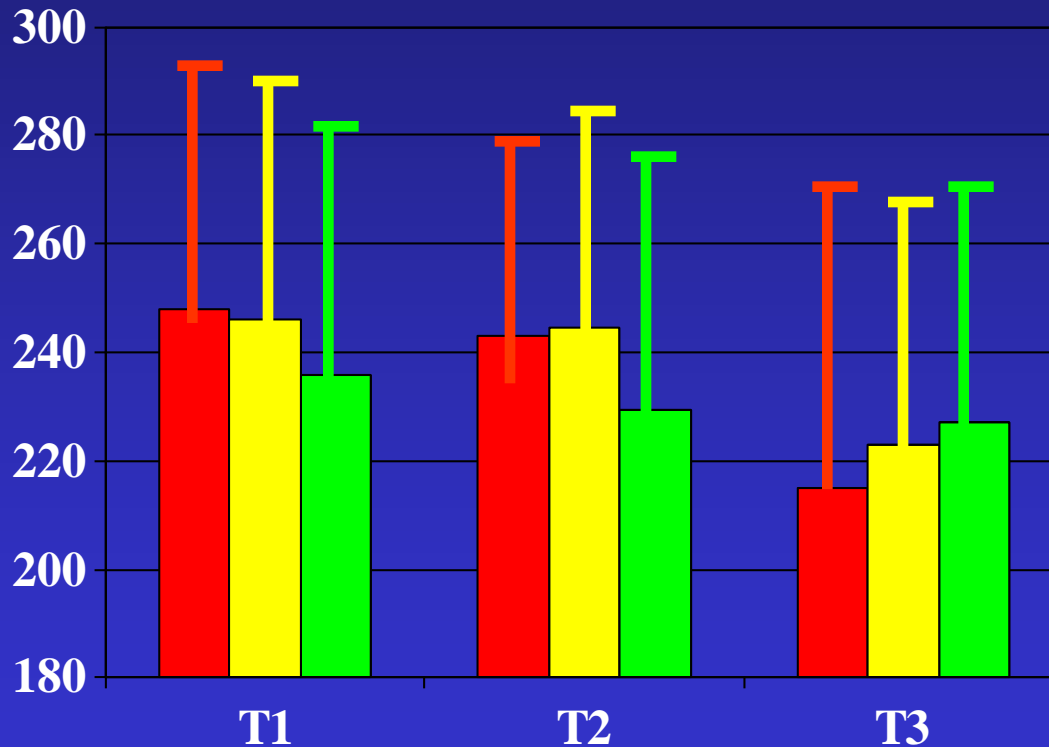
Ergebnisse prospektiver Studien

Studie	Stichprobe	Relatives Risiko (95% CI)
Yoshitake et al. 1995	Gemeinde (n = 826; 7 Jahre)	0,18 (0,06 – 0,61) täglich körperlich aktiv
Laurin et al. 2001	Gemeinde (n = 4615; 5 Jahre)	0,5 (0,28 – 0,9) bei hoher Aktivität
Wang et al. 2002	Gemeinde (n = 776; 6,4 Jahre)	0,6 (0,38 – 0,94) bei täglicher Aktivität
Lindsay et al. 2002	Gemeinde (n = 4615; 5 Jahre)	0,69 (0,5 – 0,96) bei regelmäßiger Aktivität

Cholesterinwerte im Verlauf

Ergebnisse der ILSE

Cholesterin



Diagnose:

F = 2.72 (n.s.)

Zeit:

F = 13.96 (p<0.01)

Zeit*Diagnose:

F = 5.49 (p<0.01)

AD

MCI/aacd

Kontrollen



Statins and cognitive function in the elderly

The Cardiovascular Health Study

C. Bernick, MD; R. Katz, PhD; N.L. Smith, PhD; S. Rapp, MD; R. Bhadelia, MD; M. Carlson, PhD;
and L. Kuller, MD, for the Cardiovascular Health Study Collaborative Research Group*

Abstract—Objective: To examine the association of statin drug use on cognitive and MRI change in older adults. **Methods:** Participants in the Cardiovascular Health Study, a longitudinal study of people age 65 or older, were classified into three groups determined by whether they were taking statin drugs on a continuous basis, intermittently, or not at all. The untreated group was further divided into categories based on National Cholesterol Education Program recommendations for lipid-lowering treatment. Participants with prevalent or incident clinical TIA or stroke or with baseline Modified Mini-Mental State Examination (3MS) scores at or below 80 were excluded. Outcomes examined included rate of change on the 3MS over an average observational period of 7 years, along with changes in MRI white matter grade and measures of atrophy. **Results:** Three thousand three hundred thirty-four participants had adequate data for analysis. At baseline, the untreated group in which lipid-lowering drug treatment was recommended were slightly older, less likely to be on estrogen replacement, and had higher serum cholesterol and lower 3MS scores than the statin-treated group. The rate of decline on the 3MS was 0.48 point/year less in those taking statins compared with the untreated group for which treatment was recommended ($p = 0.069$) and 0.49 point/year less in statin users compared with the group in which lipid-lowering treatment was not recommended ($p = 0.009$). This effect remained after controlling for serum cholesterol levels. One thousand seven hundred thirty participants with baseline 3MS scores of >80 underwent cranial MRI scans on two occasions separated by 5 years. There was no significant difference in white matter grade change or atrophy measures between groups. **Conclusion:** Statin drug use was associated with a slight reduction in cognitive decline in an elderly population. This relationship could not be completely explained by the effect of statins on lowering of serum cholesterol.

NEUROLOGY 2005;65:1388-1394

Neurology 2005

N = 2.258
Prospektiv 4,5 Jahre



Mediterranean Diet and Risk for Alzheimer's Disease

Nikolaos Scarmeas, MD,¹⁻³ Yaakov Stern, PhD,¹⁻³ Ming-Xin Tang, PhD,^{1,4} Richard Mayeux, MD,¹⁻³ and Jose A. Luchsinger, MD^{1,5}

Objective: Previous research in Alzheimer's disease (AD) has focused on individual dietary components. There is converging evidence that composite dietary patterns such as the Mediterranean diet (MeDi) is related to lower risk for cardiovascular disease, several forms of cancer, and overall mortality. We sought to investigate the association between MeDi and risk for AD.

Methods: A total of 2,258 community-based nondemented individuals in New York were prospectively evaluated every 1.5 years. Adherence to the MeDi (zero- to nine-point scale with higher scores indicating higher adherence) was the main predictor in models that were adjusted for cohort, age, sex, ethnicity, education, apolipoprotein E genotype, caloric intake, smoking, medical comorbidity index, and body mass index.

Results: There were 262 incident AD cases during the course of 4 (± 3.0 ; range, 0.2–13.9) years of follow-up. Higher adherence to the MeDi was associated with lower risk for AD (hazard ratio, 0.91; 95% confidence interval, 0.83–0.98; $p = 0.015$). Compared with subjects in the lowest MeDi tertile, subjects in the middle MeDi tertile had a hazard ratio of 0.85 (95% confidence interval, 0.63–1.16) and those at the highest tertile had a hazard ratio of 0.60 (95% confidence interval, 0.42–0.87) for AD (p for trend = 0.007).

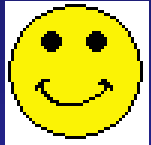
Interpretation: We conclude that higher adherence to the MeDi is associated with a reduction in risk for AD.

Ann Neurol 2006;59:912–921



Prävention der Demenzen

Fazit I



Hohe Evidenz:

Behandlung der arteriellen Hypertonie, regelmäßige körperliche Aktivität, lebenslanges Lernen, aktuelle Kognitive Aktivität, Ernährung (insbesondere Mittelmeerkost)



Fraglich oder noch ungeklärte Evidenz:

Einnahme von Antirheumamitteln, Statine, Gewichtsreduktion, psychosozialer Stress, Depressionen



Niedrigere oder fehlende Evidenz:

Vitamin E, Östrogene, Gingko Biloba, Antidementiva, Multivitaminpräparate sowie viele andere freiverkäufliche Nahrungsergänzungstoffe

Prävention der Demenzen

Fazit II

Alzheimer-Demenz und vaskuläre Demenz teilen eine Vielzahl von Risikofaktoren

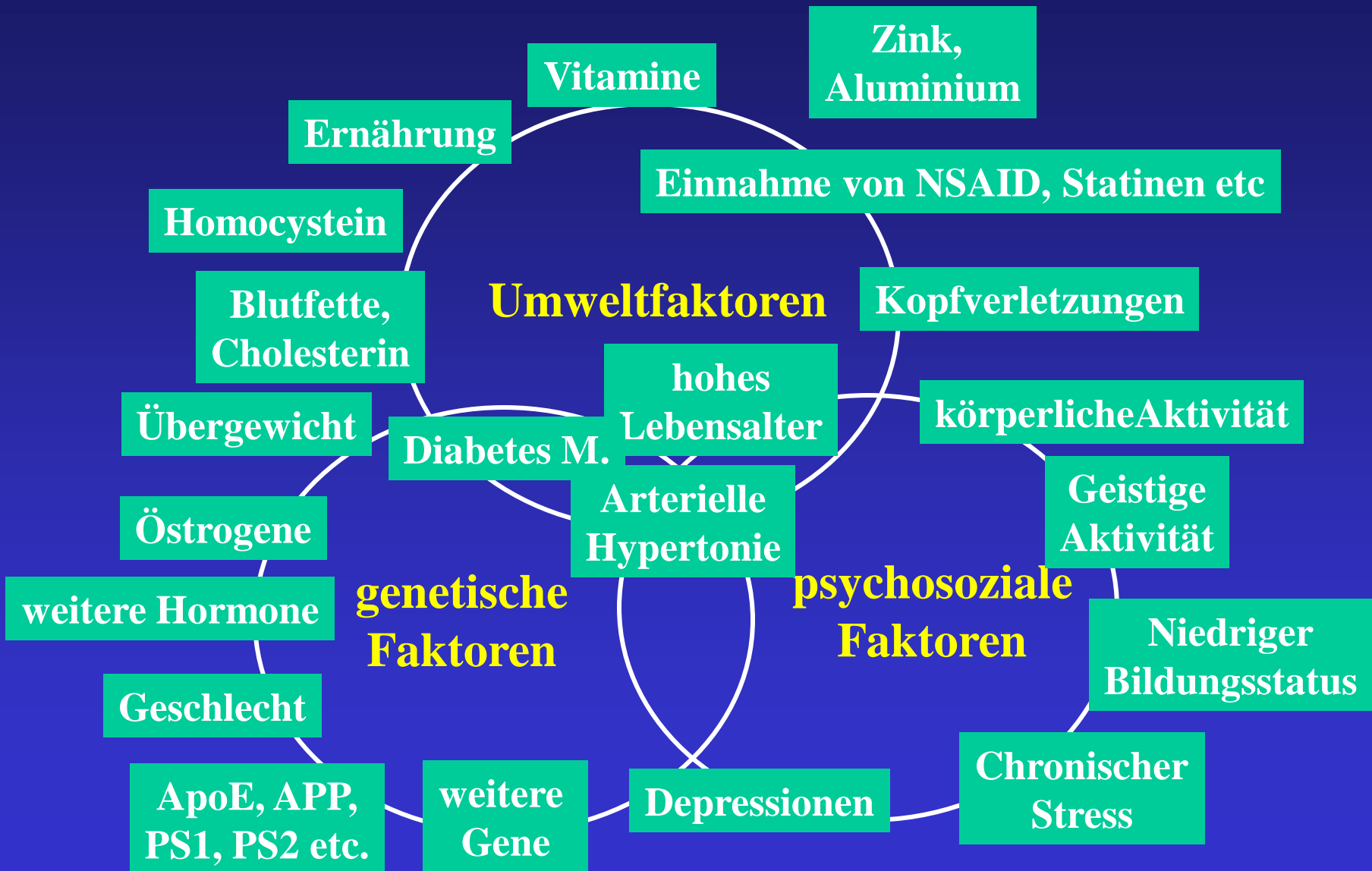
Viele dieser Risikofaktoren sind potenziell auch noch im Alter beeinflussbar

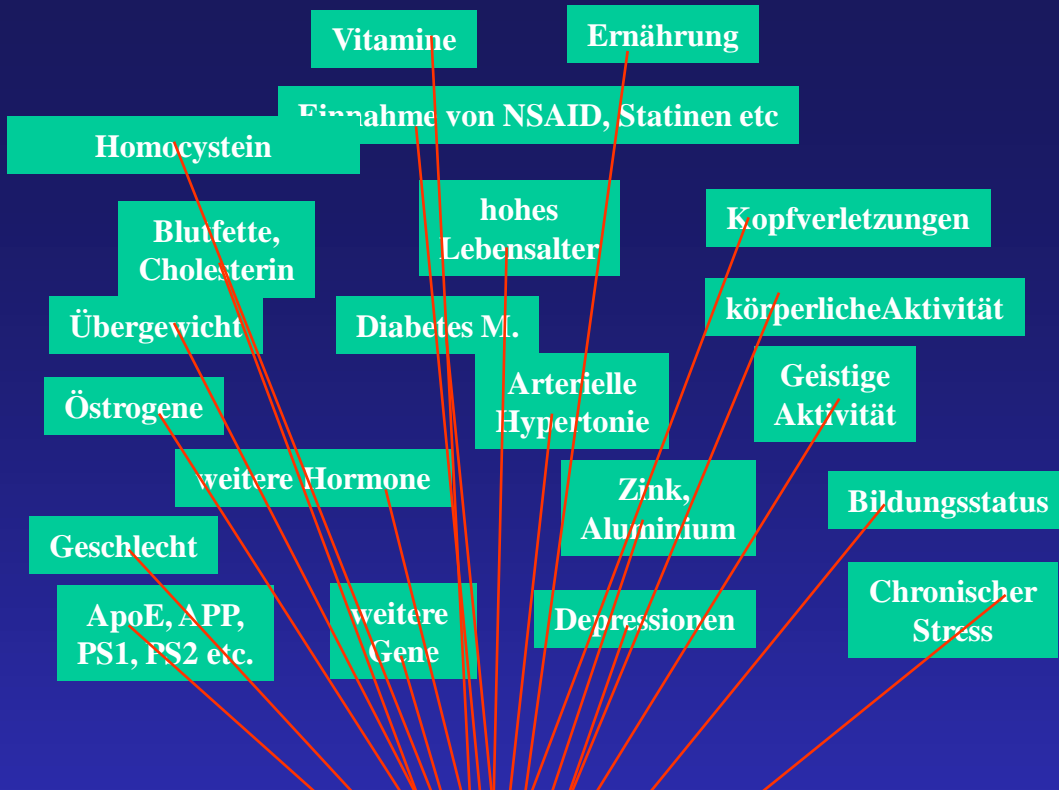
Prospektive Interventionsstudien zur Primärprävention liegen bislang nur vereinzelt vor

Bislang keine gesicherten Daten zur Frühbehandlung (sekundäre Prävention) von Risikopopulationen (leichte kognitive Beeinträchtigung)

- 1. Welche Einflussfaktoren bestimmen jeweils individuell kognitive Entwicklung im Alter?**
- 2. Wie wirken diese Faktoren intraindividuell zusammen?**
- 3. Wie können diese Faktoren für jeweils individuelle Verhaltensänderung nutzbar gemacht werden (Mein Präventionsprogramm)?**

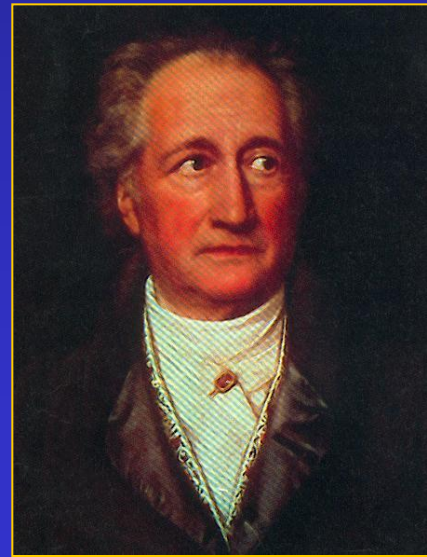
Einflussfaktoren für die Alzheimer-Demenz laut epidemiologischen Studien





Veränderungen im Gehirn

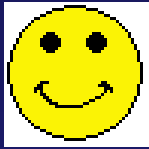
- Amyloide Plaques
- Schädigung der kleinen Hirngefäße
- Schädigung der großen Hirngefäße
- Anzahl der Synapsen
- Konnektivität
- Neuroneogenese
- Gehirndurchblutung
- „Plastizität“
- „Reservekapazität“



**Frage des intraindividuellen
Zusammenwirkens der
gesicherten Einflussfaktoren
(Modell?)**

Einflussfaktoren für die Alzheimer-Demenz laut epidemiologischen Studien





Schutz

Ernährung mit
Mediterraner Kost

Einnahme von NSAID, Statinen etc

Hoher Bildungsstatus

Hohe Geistige
Aktivität

hohe Körperliche Aktivität

ApoE 2

Sonstige Gene

Etc.



Risiko

hohes
Lebensalter

Übergewicht

Kopfverletzungen

Hohe Blutfette,
Cholesterin

niedrige Geistige
Aktivität

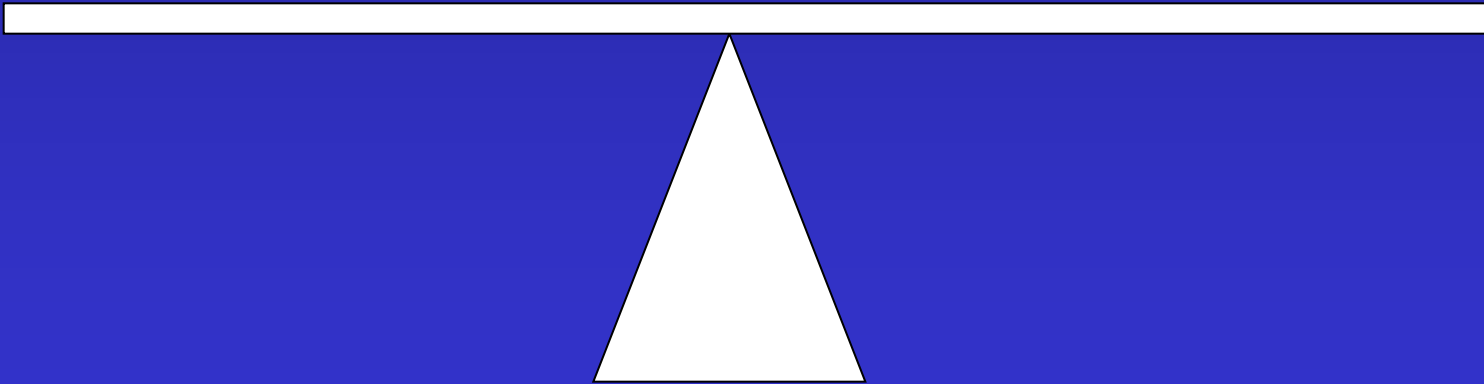
niedrige Körperliche Aktivität

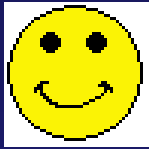
Diabetes M.

ApoE 4

Arterielle
Hypertonie

Chronischer
Stress





Schutz



Risiko

ApoE 2

Ernährung mit
Mediterraner Kost

Hoher Bildungsstatus

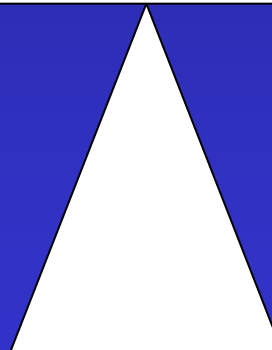
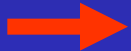
Hohe Geistige
Aktivität

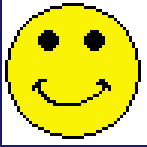
hohes
Lebensalter

Kopfverletzungen

Hohe Blutfette,
Cholesterin

niedrige Körperliche Aktivität





Schutz



Risiko

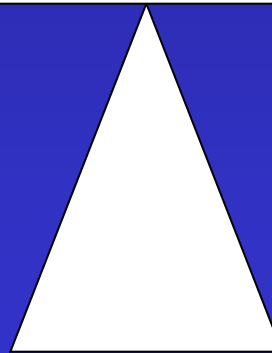
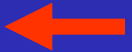
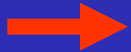
Hohe Geistige
Aktivität

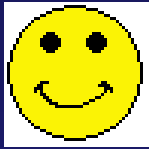
niedrige Körperliche Aktivität

hohes
Lebensalter

Kopfverletzungen

Hohe Blutfette,
Cholesterin





Schutz



Risiko

Hohe Geistige
Aktivität

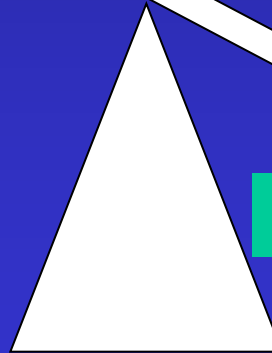
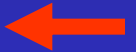
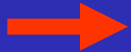
„Kognitive Beeinträchtigung“

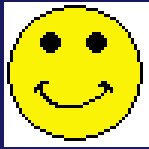
hohes
Lebensalter

Kopfverletzungen

Hohe Blutfette,
Cholesterin

niedrige Körperliche Aktivität





Schutz



Risiko

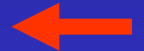
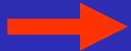
ApoE 2

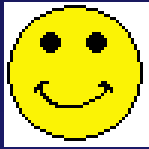
Ernährung mit
Mediterraner Kost

Hoher Bildungsstatus

Hohe Geistige
Aktivität

hohes
Lebensalter





Schutz



Risiko

„Kognitive Reserve“

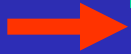
ApoE 2

Ernährung mit
Mediterraner Kost


Hoher Bildungsstatus

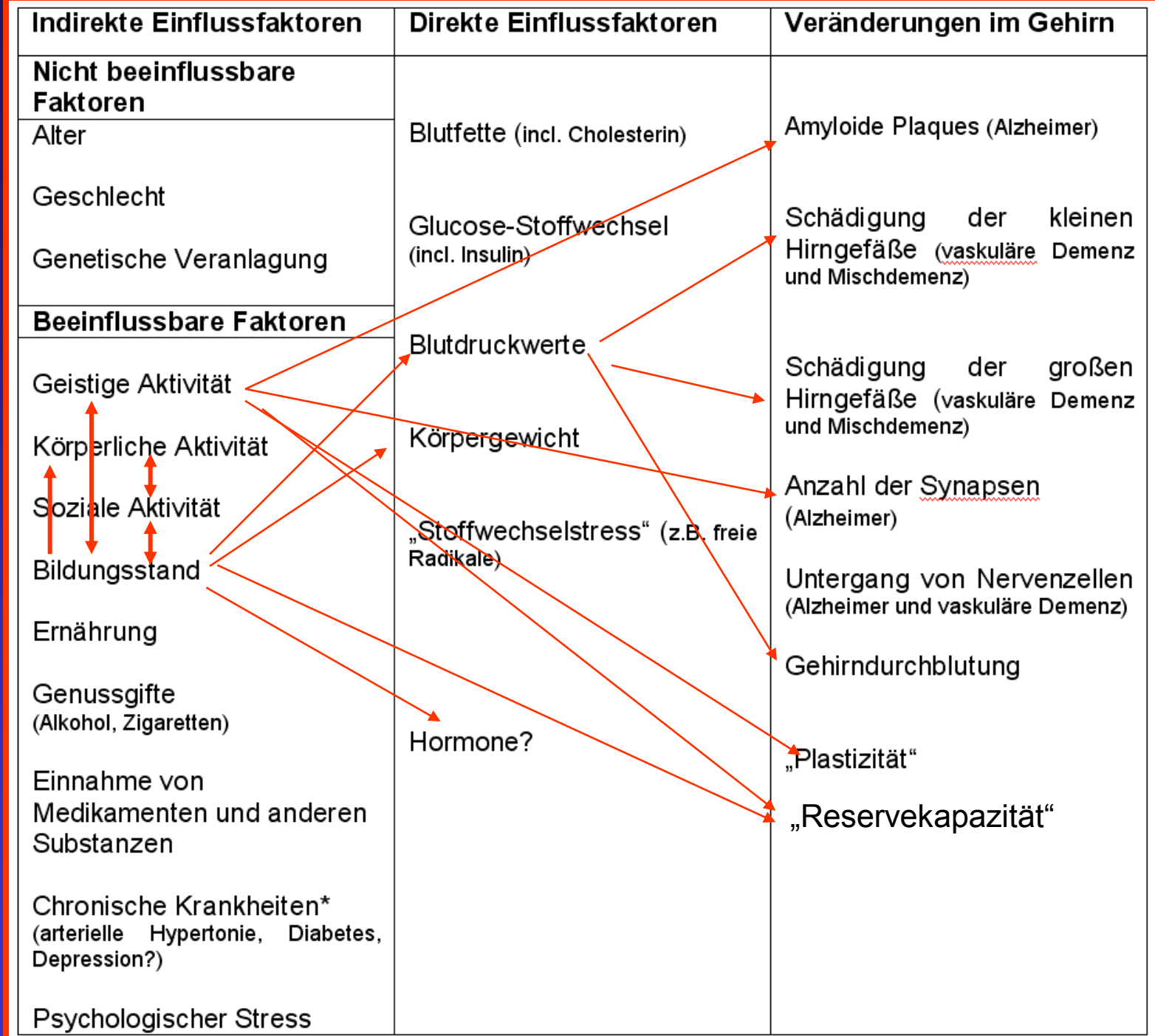
Hohe Geistige
Aktivität

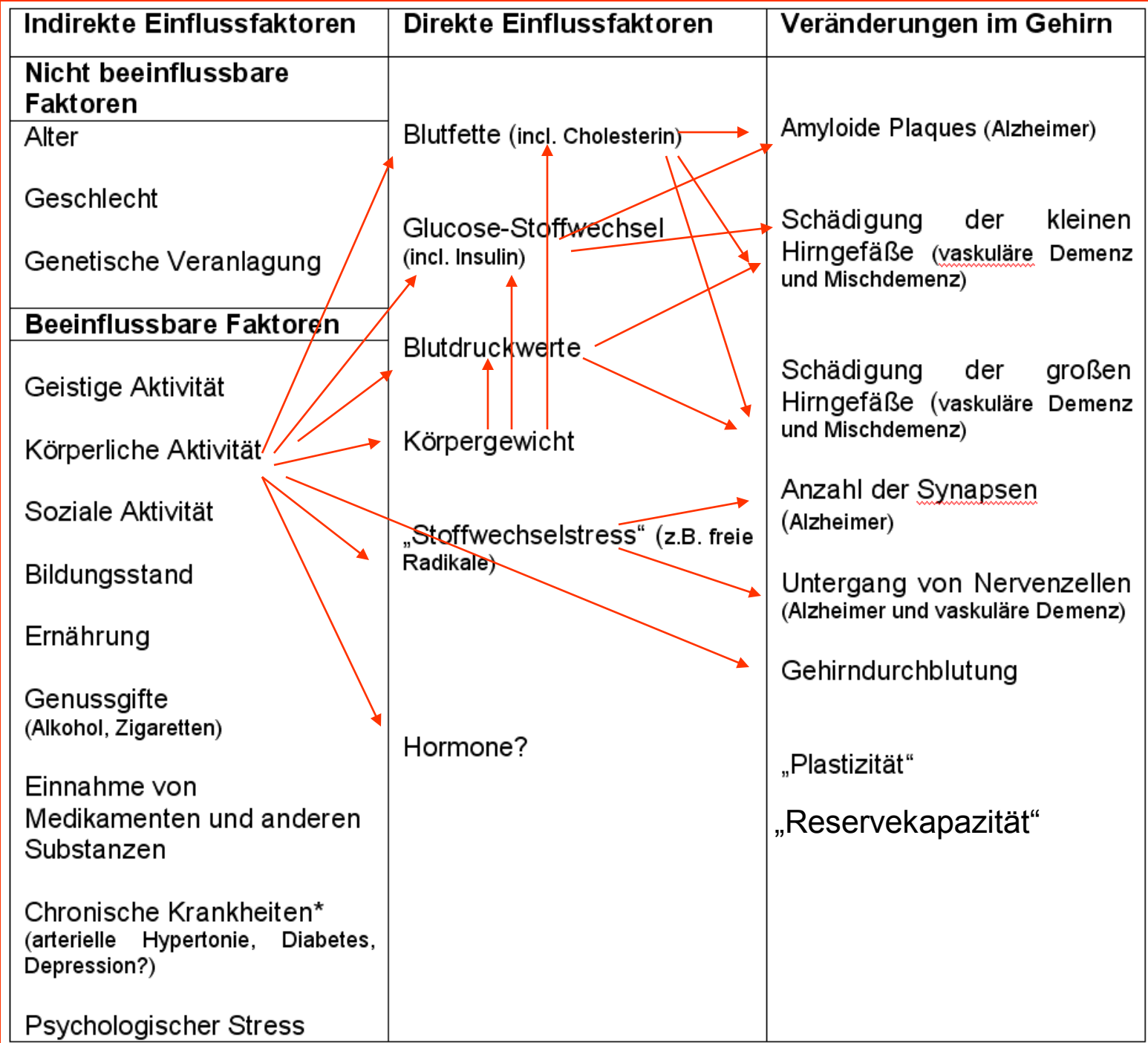
hohes
Lebensalter



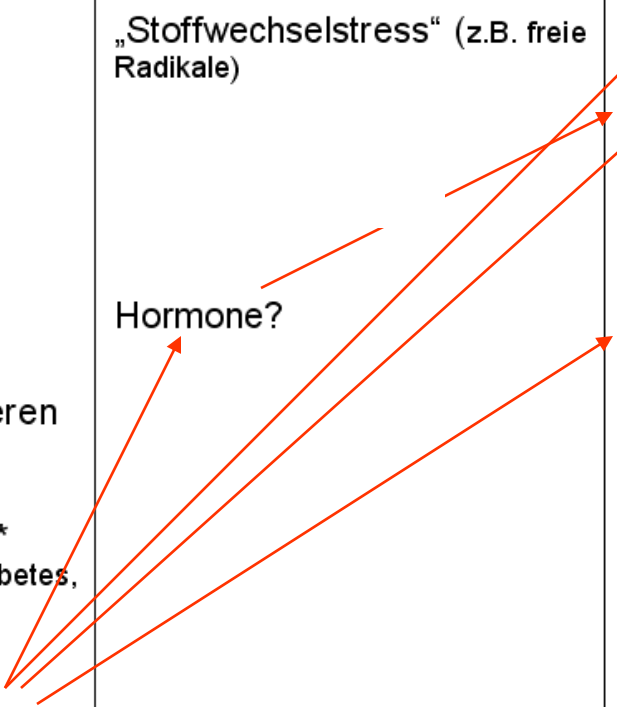
**Frage der Interaktion
bzw. Interkorrelation der
Einflussfaktoren
(Komplexität)**

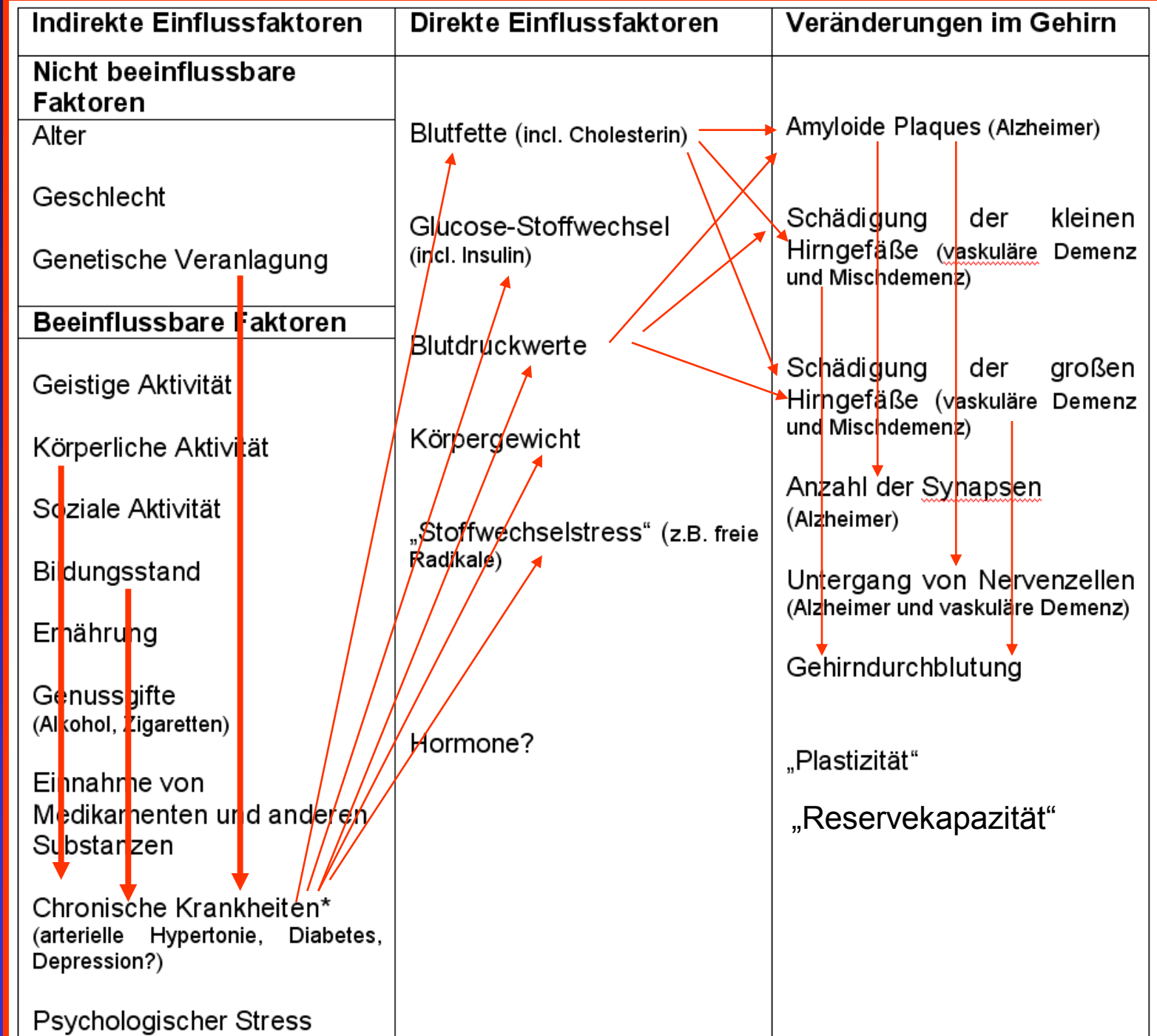
Indirekte Einflussfaktoren	Direkte Einflussfaktoren	Veränderungen im Gehirn
Nicht beeinflussbare Faktoren		
Alter	Blutfette (incl. Cholesterin)	Amyloide Plaques (Alzheimer)
Geschlecht		
Genetische Veranlagung	Glucose-Stoffwechsel (incl. Insulin)	Schädigung der kleinen Hirngefäße (<u>vaskuläre</u> Demenz und Mischdemenz)
Beeinflussbare Faktoren		
Geistige Aktivität	Blutdruckwerte	Schädigung der großen Hirngefäße (vaskuläre Demenz und Mischdemenz)
Körperliche Aktivität	Körpergewicht	
Soziale Aktivität		Anzahl der <u>Synapsen</u> (Alzheimer)
Bildungsstand	„Stoffwechselstress“ (z.B. freie Radikale)	Untergang von Nervenzellen (Alzheimer und vaskuläre Demenz)
Ernährung		Gehirndurchblutung
Genussgifte (Alkohol, Zigaretten)		„Plastizität“
Einnahme von Medikamenten und anderen Substanzen	Hormone?	„Reservekapazität“
Chronische Krankheiten* (arterielle Hypertonie, Diabetes, Depression?)		
Psychologischer Stress		





Indirekte Einflussfaktoren	Direkte Einflussfaktoren	Veränderungen im Gehirn
Nicht beeinflussbare Faktoren		
Alter	Blutfette (incl. Cholesterin)	Amyloide Plaques (Alzheimer)
Geschlecht		
Genetische Veranlagung	Glucose-Stoffwechsel (incl. Insulin)	Schädigung der kleinen Hirngefäße (<u>vaskuläre</u> Demenz und Mischdemenz)
Beeinflussbare Faktoren		
Geistige Aktivität	Blutdruckwerte	Schädigung der großen Hirngefäße (vaskuläre Demenz und Mischdemenz)
Körperliche Aktivität	Körpergewicht	
Soziale Aktivität		Anzahl der <u>Synapsen</u> (Alzheimer)
Bildungsstand	„Stoffwechselstress“ (z.B. freie Radikale)	Untergang von Nervenzellen (Alzheimer und vaskuläre Demenz)
Ernährung		Gehirndurchblutung
Genussgifte (Alkohol, Zigaretten)	Hormone?	„Plastizität“
Einnahme von Medikamenten und anderen Substanzen		„Reservekapazität“
Chronische Krankheiten* (arterielle Hypertonie, Diabetes, Depression?)		
Psychologischer Stress		

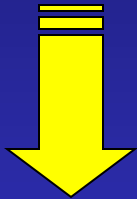




**Vom Einflussfaktor
zur (individuellen)
Intervention?**

Prävention der Demenz

primär



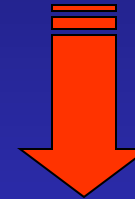
Verhinderung von Neuerkrankungen bei Gesunden;
Ausschaltung von Risikofaktoren
(Allgemein-Bevölkerung)

sekundär

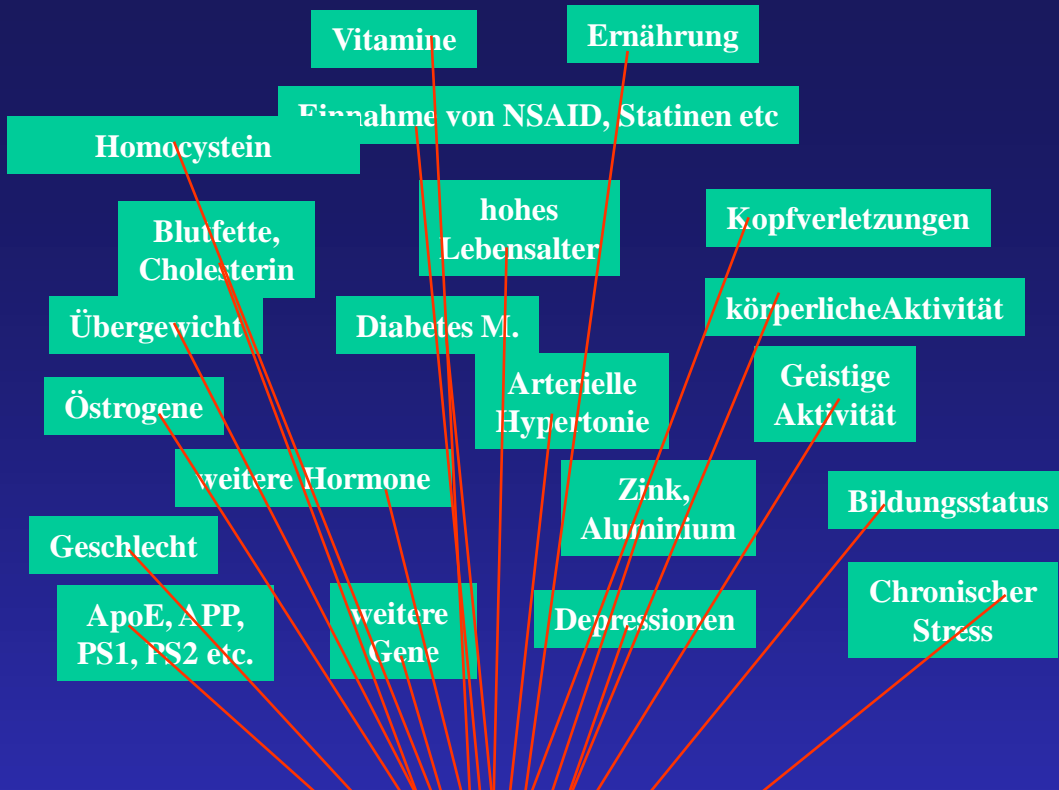


Früherkennung mit dem Ziel, der Intervention, um die Manifestation des klinischen Vollbildes zu verzögern
(Risikopopulation)

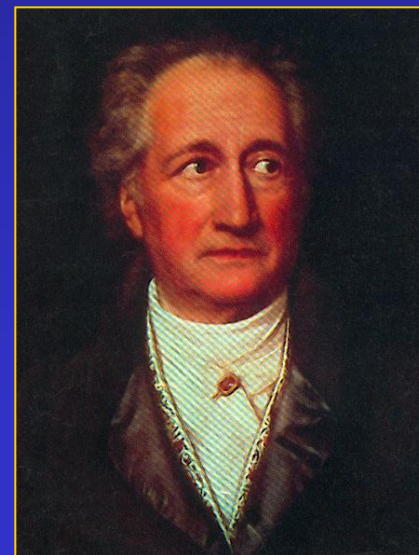
tertiär



Therapeutische Intervention zur Verhinderung eines Fortschreitens
(manifest Erkrankte)



Veränderungen im Gehirn
 Amyloide Plaques
 Schädigung der kleinen Hirngefäße
 Schädigung der großen Hirngefäße
 Anzahl der Synapsen
 Konnektivität
 Neuroneogenese
 Gehirndurchblutung
 „Plastizität“
 „Reservekapazität“



Einflussfaktoren für die Alzheimer-Demenz laut epidemiologischen Studien



beeinflussbar

Ernährung

Einnahme von Medikamenten

**Geistige
Aktivität**

Körperliche Aktivität

**Hohe Blutfette,
Cholesterin**

**Arterielle
Hypertonie**

Nicht beeinflussbar

**hohes
Lebensalter**

Kopfverletzungen

Bildungsstatus

ApoE Status

Sonstige Gene

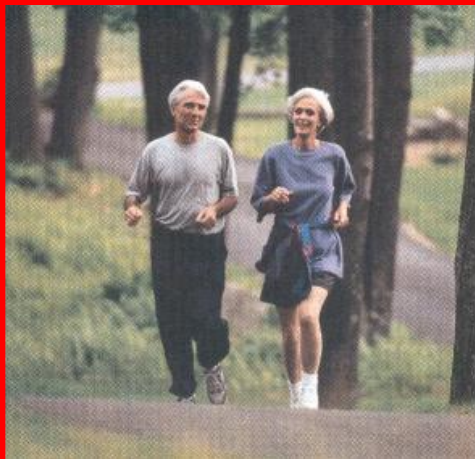
CAIDE Score

Einflussfaktoren	Wertebereich	Punkte
Alter	< 47 Jahre	0
	47-53 Jahre	3
	> 53 Jahre	4
Bildungsstand	≥ 10 Jahre	0
	7-9 Jahre	2
	< 7 Jahre	3
Geschlecht	Weiblich	0
	Männlich	1
<u>Blutdruck</u>	< 140 mmHg	0
	> 140 mmHg	2
Body Mass Index	< 30 kg/m ²	0
	> 30 kg/m ²	2
Gesamt-Cholesterin	< 6,5 mmol/L	0
	> 6,5 mmol/L	2
Körperliche Aktivität	Ja	0
	Nein	1

CAIDE Score

Punktsumme CAIDE-Score	Demenz-Risiko
0 bis 5	1,0%
6 bis 7	1,9%
8 bis 9	4,2%
10 bis 11	7,4%
12 bis 15	16,4%

AKTIVA
Aktive Kognitive
Stimulation: Vorbeugung im Alter



Erhalt kognitiver Fähigkeiten

Aktiva

Das Risiko für Altersdemenz aktiv reduzieren



Teilnahme ab 65 Jahren

Jetzt bewerben und kostenlos an dem Pilotprojekt teilnehmen

Kontakt und Bewerben

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Maßgeblich gefördert durch:
BHF-BANK-Stiftung



- In einem Forschungsprojekt der Professur Gerontopsychiatrie werden Strategien zum Erhalt der kognitiven Fähigkeiten im Alter systematisch erforscht
- Als präventive Intervention werden neben kognitiver Aktivität auch die körperliche Bewegung und gesunde Ernährung untersucht
- 300 Senioren aus der Frankfurter Bevölkerung wurden in das interdisziplinäre Programm eingeschlossen



Klinikum der
Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität
Frankfurt am Main

Abteilung
Sportmedizin
Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität

BHF BANK STIFTUNG

JOHANNES PANTEL

Geistig fit in jedem Alter

WIE MAN MIT DER AKTIVA-METHODE
DEMENTZ VORBEUGEN KANN



Mit vielen
Übungen und
Selbsttests

BELTZ

Geistig fit in jedem Alter

Wie man mit der AKTIVA-Methode Demenz vorbeugen kann. Mit vielen Übungen und Selbsttests

Johannes Pantel

Mehr als Gehirnjogging und Denksportaufgaben - was wirklich vorbeugend gegen Demenz hilft: Mit der vielfach erprobten AKTIVA-Methode Demenz vorbeugen - dieses Buch richtet sich an alle, die sich frühzeitig über Risiko- und Schutzfaktoren... mehr



Autoren-Porträt



Inhaltsverzeichnis



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News Focus

Recent research suggests that keeping mentally and physically active when young and middle-aged can help stave off the brain degeneration of Alzheimer's

Preventing Alzheimer's: A Lifelong Commitment?



A sweating man feverishly pumping an exercise bicycle may not seem to have much in common with a chess player coolly contemplating her next move. Yet both may be protecting their brains from the ravages of Alzheimer's disease. Recent results, some from epidemiological studies and others from investigations of animal models of Alzheimer's disease, suggest that exercise—both physical and mental—can help the brain combat the pathological changes that cause the illness.

If so, then people who engage in physical exercise and intellectual activities such as reading, solving crossword puzzles, and playing cards or chess may be able to slow down the development of Alzheimer's disease, perhaps delaying it long enough that incapacitating symptoms won't appear during a person's lifetime. "The brain is an organ that, like any other organ, ages depending on how it's used," says neurologist Robert Friedland of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland, Ohio.

Yet parts of the story may not be that simple. Researchers are debating, for example, whether intellectual activities are actually protective or whether people who participate in them are more resistant to Alzheimer's disease, possibly because of the way their brains developed.

so-called cognitive reserve. According to this theory, later in life when Alzheimer's pathology begins to eat away at the brain's neurons, people with larger reserves would be better able to cope with the onslaught.

One recent study supporting Katzman's idea came 2 years ago from a Rush Presbyterian—



didn't develop Alzheimer's disease until they had about five times as many plaques and tangles as the less educated participants. "This suggests that education or cognitive activities achieve their effects by helping the brain tolerate the pathology," he says.

Not everyone finds support for the cognitive reserve theory, however. The so-called Nun Study points to a different conclusion: Early variations in how the brain develops makes some brains more resistant to developing Alzheimer's pathology than others.

David Snowdon started the Nun Study more than 15 years ago, when he was at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul. It originally included 678 members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, all of whom were born before 1917. Snowdon, now at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, reasoned that studying nuns would help him identify factors that influence Alzheimer's development because they all have similar lifestyles and medical care. This eliminates some variables, such as smoking, that might skew the results.

As in other studies, Snowdon and his colleagues found that high education levels seem to protect against Alzheimer's disease. The researchers originally thought that this supported the idea that more education leads to a higher cognitive reserve. But analysis of biographical essays the sisters