

Dementia & pesticides linked, say researchers

Dec 9, 2010 by Kristin Schafer



A good friend who lives near Seattle recently shared with me what it's like to visit her mother, who suffers increasingly from dementia. Some days she knows my friend — her daughter of 48 years — but most days she doesn't. Often she can't recall what was said moments ago, and she rarely recognizes her beautiful granddaughters at all. How utterly wrenching to watch a parent — or friend or partner — lose their connections to the world.

Healthy minds and bodies are something we all wish for our aging loved ones (not to mention ourselves). Advice on keeping your mind fit is available wherever you turn: crossword puzzles and sudoku! ginseng root! regular exercise! have a pet! And on and on...

But nobody's talking about avoiding pesticide exposure — at least, not yet. The links between chemicals and dementia keep showing up. Last week, [researchers in France reported](#) that vineyard workers exposed to pesticides were 5 times more likely to do poorly on neurological tests than workers with less pesticide exposure. When the workers were tested again 4 years after the exposures, they were twice as likely to fail a key test frequently used to diagnose dementia.

These workers are in their 40s and 50s.

The French study adds to a growing body of evidence linking chemical exposure to diseases common in the final decades of life, from Alzheimer's to Parkinson's to diabetes. Much of the latest evidence is collected in [Environmental Threats to Healthy Aging](#), a powerful report co-authored by PAN board member Dr. Ted Schettler. Here's what the scientists found:

"As we explored origins and patterns of chronic degenerative diseases, we discovered a web of conditions in the environment - including nutritional, chemical, physical and social factors - that have a direct influence on the risk of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and related chronic diseases."

The good news is that the authors also found that we can do something about it. They include a slew of recommendations for both lifestyle choices and policy changes that can help reduce our risk of dementia and other diseases of aging. [Take a look](#), and let us know what you think.

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