

## An Epidemiological Approach to the Study of Alzheimer's Disease

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Editorial

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The prevalence of Alzheimer's disease (AD) has increased dramatically in recent years. A condition that was essentially absent from pathology texts but thirty years ago is now a major concern for the aging population. Billions of dollars have been invested in a cure for a disease that is still poorly understood. Indeed,

current strategies target the effects of the disease, rather than the cause. An epidemiological approach towards understanding AD involves asking questions that build a web of ideas. What are the risk factors in populations that are highly susceptible to AD? Should scientists be following a genetic determinant such as the apolipoprotein E genotype? Or is lifestyle playing a much larger role in the onset of the disease?

Translational research may be able to fill in the gaps in our understanding of the disease. The foods we consume, medications we take, water we drink and air we breathe are all a facet of the shifts in culture. As Western culture spreads globally, so does Western illnesses such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and AD. Perhaps the best way to analyze the causes of AD is to first understand the changes in the affected population prior to the onset of disease. Bridging population genetics, anthropology and biochemistry may provide the answers to AD's biggest questions.