

ACT

SUMMER – 2021 NEWSLETTER

Adult Changes in Thought 9th Annual Symposium: “The Continued Journey in the Life Course of the ACT Study and Brain Aging Research”

This year’s summer newsletter celebrates the successful completion of our virtual three-day annual ACT symposium. In attendance were nearly 200 US & international participants who shared novel research on topics critical to our evolving understanding of Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.

The featured presentation on Day 1 of the symposium focused on the Life Course approach to understanding brain aging and development of dementia. Highlighted were actions that people can take to limit brain damage and increase cognitive reserve, such as wearing hearing aids for diagnosed hearing loss, reducing exposure to air pollution and tobacco smoke, limiting alcohol use, and reducing obesity.

Day 2 of the ACT Symposium focused on the preliminary results of the ACT COVID-19 survey, which was disseminated in the spring of this year to 1,304 ACT participants. The survey had a high response rate for surveys administered by phone. Results showed that only a few respondents had been ill with COVID. However, they also underscored the pandemic’s daunting impact on daily life, physical activity, anxiety, and depression.

The final day of the symposium highlighted the ACT study’s new 5-year funding grant, otherwise known as the U-19. The next five years will see the ACT study grow on several levels, including its sample size--from 2,000 subjects (who are participating in biennial visits) to a target of 3,000. The long-term impact of the U19 would be to contribute towards providing a better understanding of brain aging and helping to identify intervention and treatment targets to improve the cognitive and physical health of older adults.

Over the years, ACT and its affiliated studies have built a legacy of scientific findings published in dozens of journals, advancing the understanding of dementia. ACT researchers have identified and quantified numerous factors that affect brain aging, including early life exposures, education, hearing and vision loss, traumatic brain injuries, hypertension, alcohol consumption, obesity, smoking, depression and social isolation, physical inactivity, and blood sugar levels and diabetes. A few examples of specific findings:

Frequent exercisers had a 38% lower incidence of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia than those exercising 3 or fewer times per week.

Higher blood glucose levels are associated with an 18% increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia in people without diabetes and a 40% increased risk in people with diabetes.

47% of cognitively normal brains had substantial neuritic plaque density, and 33% had microinfarcts, which contradicts a widespread view that such markers are reliable indicators of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia.

We hope this newsletter illustrates the critical role ACT participants play in Alzheimer’s research. As our co-investigator, Andrea LaCroix, PhD, said, “We are all indebted to the ACT community participants past, current and future, who will be working with us on these discoveries over the next 5 years and beyond.”

Just for fun: Sweden recently elected a new Prime Minister. He was the former CEO of IKEA. He is now in the process of assembling his cabinet!

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