

## **Active lifestyle may hold key to delaying Huntington disease**

An active and mentally stimulating lifestyle could delay the onset of Huntington disease, according to a world-first study led by the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Melbourne.

Researchers found people with a genetic predisposition to Huntington disease whose daily lives included a high level of passive activities – activities that lacked physical and intellectual challenge such as watching television, talking on the phone or working in unchallenging jobs – had disease onset on average four years earlier than those who led the least passive lifestyle.

Lead researchers Professor Martin Delatycki and Dr Kaye Trembath said the discovery offered those at risk an opportunity to potentially delay disease onset by altering their lifestyle.

“People with a genetic predisposition to the disease could significantly delay its onset by minimising passive activities and ensuring they incorporate physical and intellectual activity in their daily lives,” Professor Delatycki said.

“As there is no cure for Huntington disease, this discovery is important in providing a practical lifestyle choice for those affected,” Dr Trembath said.

Huntington disease is an inherited genetic disorder that causes the gradual destruction of brain cells, leading to dementia, involuntary movements and reduced lifespan. It affects one in 10,000 people, with onset usually occurring between the ages of 30-50.

The study is the first to establish a link between lifestyle and the onset of Huntington disease in humans – a finding that has already been shown to play a role in other neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer disease, Parkinson disease and dementia.

The study, published online in *Movement Disorders*, surveyed 154 people with early-stage Huntington disease in Australia and New Zealand about their lifestyle prior to disease onset including leisure activities and occupation. It found that a passive lifestyle during the teenage years had the strongest link to early disease onset, highlighting the importance of physical and intellectual activity from an early age.

Huntington’s Victoria spokeswoman Judy Mackenzie welcomed the findings: “We are very excited about this research as we can now advise our members that there is something they can do to help delay the onset of the disease that has such a major impact on their quality of life.”

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