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FROM THE ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2025

SNAP BENEFITS LINKED TO SLOWER COGNITIVE DECLINE, 10-YEAR STUDY FINDS

Key Takeaways

- **Participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) may help protect against age-related cognitive decline, suggests an analysis of a national study.**
- **Compared to non-participants, SNAP participants had a slower decline in cognitive function during the 10-year study period, effectively maintaining an average of two to three additional years of cognitive health.**
- **Food insecurity can negatively impact cognitive function, and participating in SNAP may improve participants' diets and nutrition intake.**

TORONTO, July 30, 2025 — People who participated in the U.S. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) had slower cognitive decline over 10 years than those who didn't participate, according to new research being reported today at the [Alzheimer's Association International Conference® 2025](#) (AAIC®), in Toronto and online.

The findings highlight the potential of food assistance programs to support cognitive health in the aging population and point to the need for additional efforts to reduce disparities in cognitive aging across different racial and ethnic groups, the researchers said. They also underscore the need for public health policies that ensure equitable access to programs like SNAP, which helps low-income individuals and families buy food, particularly for populations that may face additional barriers to enrollment.

Using the nationally representative Health and Retirement Study (HRS), researchers compared participants in SNAP to those who were eligible for the program but didn't participate. They determined that SNAP participants had a 0.10% slower decline in overall cognitive function, or two to three additional years of cognitive health over the 10-year period.

“Research has shown that food insecurity can negatively impact cognitive function, and this is one of the first long-term studies to show that food assistance programs can positively impact cognition,” said [Maria C. Carrillo, Ph.D.](#), Alzheimer's Association chief science officer and medical affairs lead. “Simple, everyday actions can make a difference in brain health and may even lower the risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. The Alzheimer's Association is committed to helping all people build these habits into their daily lives, including eating right, one of our [10 Healthy Habits for Your Brain](#).”

Researchers analyzed a racially and ethnically representative group of people age 50 and older comparing 1,131 (average age ~63 years) who were enrolled in SNAP in 2010 to 1,216 who were eligible for SNAP but did not participate (average age ~66 years). Memory and executive function — the ability to plan and carry out tasks — were assessed every two years between 2010 and 2020 via telephone or web-based interviews. People with an initial cognition summary score indicating cognitive impairment or dementia (11 or less out of 27 points) were excluded from the analysis.

While a 0.10-point difference in annual cognitive decline may seem small, the researchers note that its long-term impact is significant. “For someone starting at a healthy cognitive score, this slower decline could delay reaching the threshold for mild cognitive impairment by nearly a decade,” said Linlin Da, MPH, lead author of the study and a Ph.D. candidate in health services research at the University of Georgia, Athens.

“This suggests SNAP participation, or another similar nutrition support program, could significantly delay the onset of cognitive impairment or dementia, allowing people to preserve their ability to manage medications, finances and daily tasks longer,” said Da. “This ultimately supports greater independence and higher quality of life in older adulthood.”

“At the same time, we discovered that this protective effect is not the same for everyone: non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic older adults did not benefit as much in cognitive functions compared to non-Hispanic white participants,” Da added.

Comparing the cognitive findings for White, Black and Hispanic SNAP participants in the study to their peers who didn’t participate in SNAP, the researchers found all three groups benefitted, but observed much stronger benefits and slower decline for the White SNAP participants.

“We hope health care providers will see that potentially delaying cognitive impairment is another reason to help their patients-in-need secure access to food assistance,” said Suhang Song, Ph.D., corresponding author of the study and assistant professor in the department of health policy and management at the University of Georgia College of Public Health.

About the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference® (AAIC®)

The Alzheimer’s Association International Conference (AAIC) is the world’s largest gathering of researchers from around the world focused on Alzheimer’s and other dementias. As a part of the Alzheimer’s Association’s research program, AAIC serves as a catalyst for generating new knowledge about dementia and fostering a vital, collegial research community.

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The Alzheimer’s Association is a worldwide voluntary health organization dedicated to Alzheimer’s care, support and research. Our mission is to lead the way to end Alzheimer’s and all other dementia — by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer’s and all other dementia®. Visit alz.org or call 800.272.3900.

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- Linlin Da, MPH, et al. The association between Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation and cognitive decline by racial/ethnic groups: a 10-year longitudinal study. (Funding: National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences of the National Institutes of Health UL1TR002378)

*** AAIC 2025 news releases may contain updated data that does not match what is reported in the following abstract. ***

Proposal ID: 97630

Poster: Wednesday, July 30, 2025

Slot: P2-15 Public Health: Prevention (nonpharmacological)

The association between Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation and cognitive decline by racial/ethnic groups: a 10-year longitudinal study

Background: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays a significant role in addressing food insecurity, but its potential impact on cognitive decline in older adults remains largely unexplored. Few studies have examined the relationship between SNAP participation and cognitive health, with limited focus on racial/ethnic disparities and specific cognitive domains. This study investigates the association between SNAP participation and cognitive decline and assesses whether such association differs across racial/ethnic groups and cognitive domains.

Method: The analytic sample (n=2,347) includes participants in the Health and Retirement Study who were enrolled in SNAP in 2010. We defined SNAP users as eligible if their household income was at or below 130% of the federal poverty threshold at the time of the interview. Cognition was assessed biennially from 2010 through 2020 using a telephone-based cognitive status interview or web-based interviews. Linear mixed regression models were used to estimate the associations between SNAP participation and cognitive decline by racial/ethnic groups.

Result: This study found that SNAP participation was associated with a slower rate of cognitive decline in global cognition ($\beta = 0.09$, 95% CI: 0.05, 0.14, $p < 0.001$), memory ($\beta = 0.07$, 95% CI: 0.03, 0.11, $p < 0.001$), and executive function ($\beta = 0.03$, 95% CI: 0.01, 0.04, $p = 0.004$). When stratified by racial/ethnic groups, a slightly faster decline in global cognition and memory was observed among non-Hispanic Black (global cognition: $\beta = -0.12$, 95% CI: -0.22, -0.01, $p = 0.04$; memory: $\beta = -0.08$, 95% CI: -0.17, 0.01, $p = 0.09$) and Hispanic (global cognition: $\beta = -0.12$, 95% CI: -0.23, -0.01, $p = 0.03$; memory: $\beta = -0.10$, 95% CI: -0.19, -0.00, $p = 0.05$) compared to non-Hispanic White. No significant racial/ethnic differences were observed for executive function.

Conclusion: Our findings suggest that SNAP participation may provide a protective effect on slowing cognitive decline, and such an effect differs by racial/ethnic groups. These results underscore the significance of nutrition assistance programs in supporting cognitive health in older adults. Future studies are warranted to further explore the underlying mechanisms between SNAP and cognitive health by racial/ethnic groups.

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