

A new study shows that the incidence of depression in postmenopausal women may be linked to an increased consumption of high glycemic index foods, added sugars, and refined grains.

Diets high in added sugars and refined grains may increase risk of depression

It is predicted that depression will be the second-leading cause of burden on society among all diseases by the year 2020. At the same time, global consumption of refined high glycemic index (GI) foods is steadily rising. There is some evidence that these trends may be related.

A new study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* investigated the possible association between higher dietary GI and glycemic load (GL) and the prevalence and incidence of depression.

The prospective cohort study included more than 87,000 women who participated in the Women's Health Initiative Observational Study (WHI) between 1994 and 1998 and at the 3 year follow-up. At the beginning of the study, participants completed a 145-item food-frequency questionnaire (FFQ) designed for the WHI to analyze dietary GI, GL and other carbohydrates (added sugars, total sugars, glucose, sucrose, lactose, fructose, and starch). Depressive symptoms were measured by using participant responses to the Burnam 8-item scale for depressive disorders administered at baseline and at the 3-y follow-up.

Researchers found that the odds of depression corresponded to increasing dietary glycemic index. In addition, as intake of dietary added sugars and non-whole/refined grain consumption increased, the incidence of depression also increased. On the other hand, higher consumption of lactose (milk sugar), fiber, whole fruit and vegetables were significantly associated with lower incidence of depression.

The results of this study indicate that high-GI diets and added sugars could be a risk factor for depression in older women. The authors suggest that randomized trials should be conducted to examine the possibility that low-GI foods could be beneficial in prevention of depression in postmenopausal women.

James E Gangwisch et al. High glycemic index diet as a risk factor for depression: analyses from the Women's Health Initiative. *Am J Clin Nutr* doi: 10.3945/ajcn.114.103846.