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How Big Is Your Brain? Its Size May Protect You from Memory Loss

CHICAGO –From autopsies, researchers have long known that some people die with sharp minds and perfect memories, but their brains riddled with the plaques and tangles of Alzheimer’s disease. New research shows that those people have a larger part of the brain called the hippocampus. The research will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology 60th Annual Meeting in Chicago, April 12 – April 19, 2008.

“This larger hippocampus may protect these people from the effects of Alzheimer’s disease-related brain changes,” said study author Deniz Erten-Lyons, MD, with Oregon Health and Science University in Portland, and member of the American Academy of Neurology. “Hopefully this will lead us eventually to prevention strategies.”

For the study, researchers evaluated the brains of 12 people who had sharp memories and thinking skills at the time of death, but whose autopsies showed a high amount of Alzheimer’s plaques. Their brains were compared to those of 23 people who had the same amount of plaques in their brains, but had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease before death.

Researchers found the volume of the hippocampus part of the brain was 20 percent greater in the cognitively intact group compared to the Alzheimer’s disease group with dementia. There were no other demographic, clinical or pathological differences between the groups and the results remained the same regardless of gender, age, and total brain volume.

The study was supported by grants from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Institute on Aging.

The American Academy of Neurology, an association of more than 21,000 neurologists and neuroscience professionals, is dedicated to improving patient care through education and research. A neurologist is a doctor with specialized training in diagnosing, treating and managing disorders of the brain and nervous system such as Alzheimer’s disease, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, and stroke. For more information about the American Academy of Neurology, visit www.aan.com.

Editor’s Note: Dr. Erten-Lyons will present this research during a scientific platform session at 2:00 p.m. CT/3:00 p.m. ET, on Tuesday, April 15, 2008, in Room 178AB of McCormick Place West Convention Center.

She will be available for media questions during a press briefing at 9:00 a.m. CT/10:00 a.m. ET, on Monday, April 14, 2008, in the on-site Press Interview Room, room 182.

If you are a member of the media interested in listening to the press briefing via conference call, please call the AAN Press Room (April 12 – 18) at (312) 791-7053.

CHICAGO

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AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NEUROLOGY

60TH ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 12–19, 2008