

# Minds of older women fuzzier after general anesthesia than men's

21 July 2015

(HealthDay)—Older women are much more likely than men to suffer brain dysfunction after surgery with general anesthesia, a new study finds.

Researchers who analyzed data from hundreds of older adults in the United States found faster declines in [mental function](#) and [brain volume](#) for both women and men who had surgery with [general anesthesia](#) compared to those who had no surgery.

But the long-term decline was much greater in women than in men. The mental fall-off was especially severe among women who had multiple surgeries with general anesthesia, the researchers said.

"This is one of the first studies to suggest that among older adults, women are at a higher risk for postoperative [brain dysfunction](#) than men," study author Dr. Katie Schenning of Oregon Health & Science University, said in an association news release.

"Our research clearly shows an association between surgery, general anesthesia and cognitive decline in older adults," she added.

This not to say that women should avoid having surgery. For one thing, the study only finds an association, not proof that general anesthesia prompts mental decline in women.

Also, more studies are needed to confirm this observation and to identify ways to minimize the effects of surgery and general anesthesia on older adults, she said.

"Future research should focus on whether certain people are more susceptible to postoperative cognitive decline by virtue of sex or genetic risk factors," Schenning concluded.

The study was to be presented Tuesday at the

Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Washington, D.C. Data and conclusions presented at meetings are usually considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

**More information:** The U.S. National Institute of General Medical Sciences has more about [anesthesia](#).

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APA citation: Minds of older women fuzzier after general anesthesia than men's (2015, July 21) retrieved 2 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-07-minds-older-women-fuzzier-anesthesia.html>

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