Healthy Brains Together

The Community Newsletter of the Duke-UNC Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center

Duke-UNC Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC)

In this issue, we shine a spotlight Dr. María Marquine and the Diversity in Aging Research team at Duke (page 3). We also discuss the importance of a healthy lifestyle and exercise for brain health and highlight an exciting collaboration with the Black Men's Brain Health Study (pages 3–4). We wish you a fun and safe summer and hope you find time to exercise, relax, spend time with friends and family, and travel!

Thank you for attending the Duke-UNC ADRC ABCs event!

On May 18th, over 50 attendees joined us for a fantastic event where ADRC staff and faculty shared updates, met participants, and celebrated our progress. We appreciate everyone who filled out the post-event survey—your feedback will help us improve future events. In the photo, you can see Dr. Kathie Welsh-Bohmer in the exercise session with the attendees. Thank you for being a part of our community!

With all attendees agreeing the event was useful to them, one study participant’s feedback speaks to the big picture benefits of being involved in this type of research,

“the ABCs event was very supportive of all of us who are traveling this path. It’s good to know that there are so many intelligent, caring people working to mitigate and, hopefully, eradicate this awful disease. It gives me comfort to know that while I may or may not benefit from our work, my children (who have a genetic probability from each parent) may have a brighter future.”

Please send an email to ADRC@duke.edu if you’d like a copy of the presentations from this year’s event including one that highlighted other opportunities to get involved in ADRC research. Future issues of this newsletter will feature these studies. We hope to see you at the next ABCs event in 2025!
Duke-UNC ADRC research highlighted in news

Dr. Heather Whitson, Co-Director of the Duke-UNC ADRC recently spoke with ABC11 news about ongoing research into Alzheimer’s disease. Dr. Whitson shared insights into how the center is examining the role of lifestyle choices and other early-life risk factors in the development of Alzheimer’s disease later in life.

To watch the full news report and read the article, click here: https://abc11.com/alzheimers-medical-breakthrough-research-jill-biden/14550626/

Attend a Memory Café!

Memory cafés are welcoming, safe, comfortable places for people living with various forms of cognitive change and their care partners to socialize, engage in meaningful activities, and build support networks. Memory cafés stress connection with others and are not respite care. Click here if you would like to learn more about Memory Cafés and to find one close to you.

Alzheimer's Association International Conference (AAIC)

Join researchers, scientists, clinicians and the community for the largest international conference about dementia science from July 28th– August 1st. This year AAIC will also feature a special day of sessions designed for general audiences on Thursday, August 1st. To help attendees get the most out of the conference, a webinar on the basics of dementia and research will be held two weeks before the event. We hope this will provide helpful background information for all participants.

People living with dementia and their care partner are able to register for AAIC free of charge. Please email aaic@alz.org to receive a complimentary code.

NC Chapter of Alzheimer’s Association Monthly Programs

The North Carolina Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association offers a variety of free education and advocacy webinars and in-person programs each month. Topics include signs of Alzheimer’s disease, diagnosis, communication, living with dementia, and caregiving techniques. To view these events, click here.
Spotlight on Dr. María Marquine and the Diversity in Aging Research Team

Dr. Marquine, an Associate Professor at the Duke Aging Center and a faculty member of the Duke-UNC Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center (ADRC), leads the Diversity in Aging Research (DAR) team. The DAR team is dedicated to addressing cognitive disparities in aging and promoting health equity. Their work is vital in understanding and mitigating the differences in cognitive health outcomes among diverse populations.

The DAR team is developing tools to improve ways for providers to identify neurocognitive disorders in our country’s diverse Latino population. One currently enrolling study at Duke is called Latinos, Memory, and Thinking Skills (LAMP). LAMP seeks to understand how Spanish-speaking individuals living in the US perform on cognitive tests that assess memory and other thinking skills.

If you are interested in learning more about the DAR team and their research, please check out their website: https://agingcenter.duke.edu/dar

Healthy lifestyle reduces Alzheimer’s disease risk

A 2020 study funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and published in the online issue of *Neurology*, found that individuals who adhered to four or five of these healthy lifestyle choices had a 60% lower risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease. You can read the full article here.
Boosting Brain Health: How Exercise Later in Life Can Enhance Memory and Learning

While it is well known that exercise can prevent or delay onset of Alzheimer’s disease, it’s also important to mention that exercising later in life can positively impact brain health. A 2011 study showed that one year of moderate-intensity exercise (40 min duration, 3 days/week) increased the size of the hippocampus - a part of the brain that is important for memory & learning - in older individuals. You can read the article here.

Duke-UNC ADRC supports the Black Men’s Brain Health Study

Researchers at Duke-UNC ADRC are teaming up with Dr. Robert W. Turner’s team at George Washington University and Boston University’s ADRC to study how social factors and repetitive head injuries from American football affect cognitive health, behavior, and brain structure in Black American men.

Black Americans are nearly twice as likely to develop these diseases but are often underrepresented in studies, especially Black men. Black men may also face higher risks for neurological problems later in life due to repetitive head injuries (RHI) from sports, military service, and other activities. These injuries are linked to cognitive decline, mental health issues, and brain changes, including chronic traumatic encephalopathy. Health outcomes in Black men, whether they have a history of RHI or not, can be influenced by social factors such as economic stability, education, healthcare access, and neighborhood environment.

The Black Men’s Brain Health study aims to fill some of these important gaps in Alzheimer’s and dementia research. The study will recruit 100 Black former football players and 100 Black men of similar age without head injuries. Participants will visit Duke or Boston University for cognitive and mental health tests, brain imaging, and blood tests. This data will help diagnose normal cognition, mild cognitive impairment, or dementia. Those visiting Duke can also join the Duke-UNC ADRC Memory & Aging Study.

Want to learn about Duke-UNC ADRC studies?

To learn more about studies supported by the Duke-UNC ADRC go to our website: https://dukeuncadrc.org/current-enrolling-clinical-studies/ or click here.