

Alzheimer's disease and drowsiness: Link could help us determine where the disease first attacks the brain

Alzheimer's disease destroys command centers in the brain that keep people awake. That finding could explain why the disease often brings daytime drowsiness.

Sleep problems can precede dementias, including Alzheimer's, sometimes by decades. But the new result, described online August 12 in *Alzheimer's & Dementia*, suggests that [disordered sleeping isn't just an early harbinger of Alzheimer's](#). Instead, sleep trouble is "part of the disease," says [neuropathologist] Lea Grinberg.

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Three small regions of the hypothalamus and brain stem, all of which usually contain nerve cells that keep people awake during the day, were packed with tau, the team found. And two of the three areas had lost over 70 percent of their nerve cells, or neurons.

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The findings may fundamentally refocus dementia research on sleep-wake centers in the brain stem. "We can't continue to ignore the brain stem if we think about these dementias and how they progress," [neuroscientist Bryce] Mander says. A clearer understanding of how, when and where Alzheimer's first attacks the brain might lead to better ways to identify the disease early, and, ultimately, even stop the damage.

Read full, original post: [Alzheimer's targets brain cells that help people stay awake](#)