

## '8 extra years of mental aging': Lead exposure in childhood affects cognitive health as you age

Exposure to lead-contaminated drinking water in childhood was tied to lower levels of cognition in late adulthood, U.S. data showed.

Older adults who lived as children in cities with lead pipes and acidic or alkaline water that would leach it had lower cognitive functioning at age 72 than others ( $\beta = -0.408$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), reported Haena Lee, PhD, of the University in Southern California in Los Angeles, and colleagues.

The association between childhood lead exposure and adult cognitive function equaled the effect of 8 additional years of aging, Lee and co-authors wrote in [Science Advances](#). The overall relationship between childhood lead exposure and adult cognition persisted after adjusting for education, income, wealth, and cardiovascular health.

"Americans who are now in their 40s and 50s experienced more lead exposure as children than any other generation," noted co-author John Robert Warren, PhD, of the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. "Those who are now middle-aged or older were exposed as children to high levels of lead in drinking water, paint, car exhaust, and elsewhere," he told *MedPage Today*.

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Within the next 10 years, American children exposed to high levels of lead during the 1970s will enter older ages, Warren noted. "This means that the consequences for cognition of adolescent exposure to lead may be felt most heavily in the decades ahead," he said.

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