

Published December 31st, 2014

Changing Diets to Prevent or Reverse Alzheimer's - Is that Possible?

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"Really?" you say! The longer we live, the more important our health becomes, especially as the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and other illnesses that cause cognitive decline increases as we age. Over 50 percent of the population age 85 and older has a dementia such as Alzheimer's disease - an alarming and growing percentage, as the baby boomers move into their later years. Fortunately, recent research suggests that certain foods may help prevent or reverse diseases like Alzheimer's, as medical experts discover more about the powerful, direct relationship between our diet and our brain.

Three interesting studies were published this fall. One of the studies was a small sampling and, statistically, not relevant to the medical community; however, it is worth considering. The study was performed at UCLA and UC Irvine. Nine patients were treated with a novel therapeutic systems approach program that focused on diet, exercise, sleep, mindfulness, and some targeted vitamins. The study was released on Oct. 2.

The results were amazing: memory loss was reversed for most of the participants, with the exception of someone in the advanced stages of the illness. The primary diet changes were eliminating all simple carbohydrates, gluten and processed foods while eating more fruits, vegetables, and non-farmed fish. Sounds easy, but making significant shifts in eating patterns can be challenging.

The other two studies are about adding ingredients to your diet: walnuts and turmeric - a spice often found in curries and Indian cooking.

The Walnut Enriched Diet study was done by the New York State Institute for Basic Research and was published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*. They found that an extract in walnuts (1 ounce a day) might have a protective effect against oxidative stress caused by beta-amyloid protein. After nine months, all the tested mice in the study (I know you are not a mouse) improved in all areas - that included learning abilities, spatial memory, motor coordination and anxiety-related behavior. Walnuts are an excellent source of alpha-linoleic acid - a form of omega-3 that has been associated with heart and brain benefits.

The study regarding turmeric is coming out of the Institute of Neuroscience and Medicine in Jülich, Germany. It says that the turmeric compound promotes stem cell proliferation and differentiation in the brain. The bioactive compound found in the spice is called aromatic tumerone; previous studies have shown it can block the activation of microglial cells. When they are activated, these cells cause neuroinflammation, which is linked to certain neurological disorders.

Before this study, the effect of this spice on the brain's self-repair ability was unknown.

Turmeric contains another compound called curcumin, which is known for its anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective features. Interesting spice!

Eating more fruits and vegetables (organic if possible), whole grains, healthy fats (nuts, avocado, olive oil), legumes, reducing red meats (replace them with non-farmed fish) as well as eliminating all processed foods could make a big difference in the long run, both physically and mentally. Adding walnuts and curry to our diets might not be such a big sacrifice in the end, if it helps keep our body and brain healthy. But, before making any major changes to your diet or the diet of someone you care for, you should consult your physician and/or a registered dietician to make sure there are no detrimental effects from these changes.

I am committed to a healthier diet for long life and part of that is eating six small meals daily. I have eliminated caffeine, dairy, and daily alcohol and have added exercise and mindfulness activities to my day. I am not a mouse - so time will tell how the small changes I am making will affect my health and life - but I can say that I sleep better and have more energy.

So, have some walnuts and curry tonight! Stay healthy, strong and sharp!

Please feel free to email me any questions. I may use your questions and the answers in a future column. Email me at Linda@ElderCareAnswers.com.

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