

Health & Healing®

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NOTABLE QUOTE

*Happiness is when what you
think, what you say, and what
you do are in harmony.*

— Mahatma Gandhi

Dear Reader,

As you may know, I have a radio gig. I recently joined Deborah Ray, who's been broadcasting America's longest-running health talk show, *Healthy Talk Radio*, for 25 years. Deborah is an excellent researcher and radio personality, and when we view the medical world, it's as though we're looking through the same microscope.

My favorite part of the show is speaking to listeners who call in—many of them *Health & Healing* subscribers—and making suggestions on how they can improve their health. I'd like to encourage you to call in so we can discuss your health problems, too. If you mention on-air that you are a subscriber, I'll send you a free copy of one of my recent books.

Visit healthytalkradio.com to find out what station we're on in your area. This Web site also allows you to listen to live broadcasts and access past shows. If you're like me and computers give you a headache, call your kids or grandchildren to give you a hand. I look forward to talking with you.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

The Brain on Fire

Let's discuss Alzheimer's disease, and you'd best pay attention. If you're not already dealing with this disorder, either personally or with a family member, you likely will be. More than 5 million Americans—1 in 8 of those over 65 and nearly half of those over 85—already have this disease, and, by mid-century, up to 16 million people will have it. That's more than the total population of New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago combined!

Although we spend more than \$148 billion annually battling Alzheimer's, the outlook is just not getting any rosier. That's because conventional medicine's current approach to treatment amounts to little more than blowing smoke away from a fire, while doing absolutely nothing to extinguish the real problem.

Inflammation and the Brain

It's well known that Alzheimer's disease is marked by specific degenerative changes in the brain called beta-amyloid plaques and tangled tau proteins. What isn't known is exactly what causes this catastrophic damage. I recently heard David Perlmutter, MD, a neurologist from Naples, FL, speak and he made a very strong case for inflammation as the primary contributor. In his words, "The brain is on fire."

Inflammation is a lifesaving process used by the immune system to combat infection. But sometimes the inflammatory response is inappropriately activated. The most blatant examples are autoimmune disorders,

in which the immune system ignites a full-fledged attack against the body's own tissues. However, chronic low-level inflammation also takes its toll. It releases compounds that are toxic to neurons and unleashes a cascade of free radicals that damage and destroy brain cells.

Brain tissues affected by Alzheimer's are rife with inflammatory chemicals. In addition, blood levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a marker of inflammation, are linked with increased risk of the disease. Therefore, in order to treat and prevent Alzheimer's disease, we need a two-pronged assault on inflammation and free radicals. Unfortunately, conventional medicine has yet to embrace this simple concept.

Conventional Treatment Doesn't Work

The most popular treatment for Alzheimer's is a class of drugs called cholinesterase inhibitors, which block the breakdown of acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter involved in memory and learning. These drugs, which include Aricept (donepezil), the world's best-selling Alzheimer's drug, generate \$1.7 billion in yearly sales, but, frankly, they don't work!

Proponents of these drugs claim they delay the progression of symptoms for six to 12 months in 10–20 percent of patients who take them. This is a pretty weak claim to fame, especially for something that costs more than \$1,500 per year. But it gets worse. German researchers reviewed all of the controlled clinical trials on these drugs conducted over the past 15 years and found their benefits to be minimal, their adverse effects (vomiting, dizziness, insomnia) significant, the studies supporting them flawed, and the scientific basis for recommending them questionable.

Patients with Alzheimer's are also often loaded up with antidepressants, tranquilizers, and heavy-duty antipsychotic drugs to control symptoms and behavior. But again, this feeble attempt to blow away the smoke ignores the underlying fire—which can be dampened by nutritional therapies that curb inflammation and interrupt the cycle of free-radical damage.

Put Out the Flames of Inflammation

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin and ibuprofen, have been shown in more than 20 studies to help prevent and retard the progression of Alzheimer's. But, rather than taking NSAIDs, which have a host of gastrointestinal and cardiovascular complications, you can curb inflammation by going easy on meat and egg yolks, which contain pro-inflammatory arachidonic fatty acids, and eating more fish—nature's best source of anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats. Studies show that people who eat fish just once a week reduce their risk of Alzheimer's by 60 percent.

DHA is particularly protective. This omega-3, one of the most abundant fats in the brain, helps construct robust cellular membranes and protective myelin sheaths. It also turns on genes for brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which makes neurons more resistant to injury and free-radical damage. Low levels of DHA have been linked with Alzheimer's as well as other types of dementia and mood disorders. That's why I recommend that, in addition to eating fish, you also take fish oil supplements.

I also suggest that you increase your intake of curry, a staple in India, where there is a low incidence of Alzheimer's. Turmeric, the spice that gives curry its color, is an excellent source of curcumin, one of nature's most powerful anti-inflammatories (and antioxidants). Animal studies show that curcumin lowers levels of inflammation in the brain and reduces beta-amyloid plaque by up to 50 percent, and a human study conducted last year revealed that people who ate curry had significantly better scores on tests of cognitive function than those who never ate it.

Antioxidants Against Alzheimer's

Free-radical damage is accelerated at sites of inflammation. Your body responds by sending in antioxidants to neutralize these rogue molecules, which all too often get the upper hand. Therefore, it is imperative that anyone concerned about Alzheimer's disease

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eat plenty of antioxidant-rich vegetables and fruits and take copious amounts of supplemental antioxidants.

Because more than half of your brain mass is made of fat, fat-soluble vitamin E is particularly important, not only for prevention, but also for slowing the progression of Alzheimer's disease. In 1997, researchers from Columbia University found that, when compared to those people who took a placebo or a prescription drug, patients who took high daily doses of vitamin E for two years fared considerably better when it came to performing the activities of daily living, avoiding institutionalization, and staving off severe dementia.

A more recent study, which involved nearly 5,000 participants, looked at the combined effects of vitamin E and other antioxidants. Those taking 1,000 IU of vitamin E and 500–1,000 mg of vitamin C had a 64 to 78 percent lower risk of Alzheimer's than the placebo group. And, just a couple of months ago, researchers from Utah State University found, "high antioxidant intake from food and supplement sources of vitamin C, vitamin E, and carotene may delay cognitive decline in the elderly."

Beta-carotene is especially protective for people with a genetic predisposition to developing Alzheimer's. UCLA researchers discovered that a high blood level of beta-carotene reduced risk of cognitive decline in such people by 89 percent! For those without the inherited susceptibility, there was an 11 percent reduction in risk.

More Free Radical-Fighting Supplements

Perhaps the single most active antioxidant in the brain is glutathione. The brains of individuals with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other degenerative cognitive diseases are sorely deficient in this crucial antioxidant, and boosting glutathione levels has been shown to improve functional status.

The problem with glutathione is that it's poorly absorbed when taken orally. (That's why we administer it intravenously at the clinic.) However, you can boost your glutathione levels by taking N-acetyl-cysteine (NAC). Studies show that oral NAC dramatically increases blood levels of glutathione and improves cognitive performance in patients with Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders.

Another antioxidant I recommend for anyone concerned about Alzheimer's is alpha lipoic acid (ALA). Both water- and fat-soluble, ALA easily enters brain cells, where it traps free radicals and regenerates other antioxidants. It has been demonstrated to stabilize, and in some studies improve, cognitive function.

Boost Brain Energy

Brain cells staggering under the weight of inflammation and oxidative stress need all the energy they can get, and that's where my final recommendations come in. Acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC) transports fatty acids into the mitochondria, where they are burned for energy, and it helps remove toxic byproducts of metabolism. ALC is also converted into acetylcholine—the same neurotransmitter targeted by Aricept and other drugs—and has been shown to improve cognitive function not only in patients with early Alzheimer's, but in healthy patients as well.

Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) is also involved in energy production, plus it's a potent antioxidant. Although most of the research on supplemental CoQ10 for neurodegeneration has involved Parkinson's disease rather than Alzheimer's, I believe CoQ10 is an important component of an Alzheimer's prevention program and will soon be proven so.

The phospholipids (fat-protein molecules) phosphatidylcholine (PC) and phosphatidylserine (PS) are not directly involved in creating brain energy, but they are key constituents of the membranes that surround neurons and their mitochondria. PC has the added benefit of being a precursor to acetylcholine, and both of these compounds have been demonstrated to rather dramatically improve cognitive function in both impaired and healthy individuals.

The Big Picture

Degenerative changes in the brain begin years before symptoms of cognitive dysfunction show up. Your goal should be to put the brakes on these changes before they have a chance to turn into full-blown Alzheimer's disease. In addition to implementing the diet and supplement recommendations discussed above, there are a number of other things you can do to prevent this devastating condition.

Exercise your body and your brain. Physical activity and mental stimulation protect against dementia and slow its progression. Get a handle on your blood sugar levels. Diabetes and high insulin levels dramatically increase risk because they increase inflammation. Keep your weight under control. Obesity at midlife is associated with increased risk of dementia, likely because of its effects on inflammation and the vascular system. Keep your homocysteine level in check with folic acid and other B-complex vitamins. This significantly reduces risk of age-related cognitive dysfunction.

The statistics on Alzheimer's disease are frightening, but if you work on putting out the fire today,

your family won't have to worry about fanning away the smoke somewhere down the line.

Recommendations:

- Suggested daily doses of the supplements discussed in this article are: DHA, 500 mg (3–4 fish oil capsules); curcumin, 900–1,800 mg; natural vitamin E, 800–1,600 IU; vitamin C, 3,000 mg; natural beta-carotene, 15,000–20,000 IU; NAC, 500–1,500 mg; ALA, 200–400 mg; CoQ10, 200–400 mg; ALC, 1,000–2,000 mg; phosphatidylcholine, 250 mg; and phosphatidylserine, 100 mg. I also recommend a good multivitamin and mineral supplement.
- You'll find some of these nutrients in combination products that target memory protection. Look for them at health food stores, or order by calling Whitaker Wellness at (800) 810-6655.

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GASTROINTESTINAL DISORDERS

Natural Protocol for IBS

Each year in America, patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) make more than two million visits to the doctor. The knee-jerk reaction of most physicians is to whip out prescriptions for anti-diarrheals, antispasmodics, and even antidepressants. However, there are a number of safe, natural, and effective treatments for this very common condition. A few years ago, I wrote about a handful of these non-drug therapies, and Health Achievement Award Winner J.C. from Cibolo, TX, took my suggestions to heart. Here is his story:

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Dear Dr. Whitaker

[?] *I read your article last month about the safety of multivitamins and antioxidants, and it made sense. But I'm still concerned about vitamin E. I've read many reports stating it is harmful. I would like you to address this in your letter. — MW, Atlanta, GA*

Because I'm recommending rather high doses of vitamin E for preventing and treating Alzheimer's disease and prostate cancer in this issue, I'm happy to answer this question. Much of the concern about vitamin E stemmed from a 2005 meta-analysis conducted by researchers from Johns Hopkins University. They looked at 19 clinical trials involving more than 135,000 patients and concluded, "High-dosage (more than 400 IU/day) vitamin E supplements may increase all-cause mortality and should be avoided."

Although this study was bombarded with published criticism, the damage was done. Reports of vitamin E's questionable safety persist, even though another meta-analysis (which didn't get much media attention) re-evaluated the same data and came up with a completely different conclusion: "...vitamin E supplements appear safe for most adults in amounts less than 1,600 IU..."

I understand that it's hard to separate the wheat from the chaff when you're inundated with so much information. As I said last month, these inflammatory statements make great headlines. But I do appreciate the fact that you've taken the time to get the whole story. Rest assured that *natural* vitamin E is safe and useful for a variety of health challenges. — JW

Works for me...

My chiropractor recommended that I sleep on my back with a rolled-up hand towel under my neck for support. She also told me it would protect my skin by avoiding the pressure placed on the face when sleeping on the side or stomach. It took a little time to get used to it, but my neck pain is definitely better, and I think I've noticed a difference in my skin. — RB, Albuquerque, NM

Got a question for Dr. Whitaker? Send it to *Health & Healing*, 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854 or drwhitakerquestions@drwhitaker.com. For health tips, use the same address or worksforme@drwhitaker.com.