

Lifestyle and Dementia

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God has given us quite a blessing in our ability to reason and remember wonderful times and people in our lives. Dementia is a progressive brain disease that affects our memory and ability to reason along with other brain processes. The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease (AD), which accounts for 50-70% of dementia cases. This is one of the greatest fears about growing older but *not* an inevitable consequence of aging. There is promising and increasing evidence that lifestyle changes may reduce your risk of developing the disease. Here are some things you can do to decrease your chances of developing dementia:

- **Keep mentally active:** Read, play cards, take classes, do crossword puzzles, play an instrument, write, do computer activities, etc. Researchers believe that mental "exercise" may maintain the neural connections needed to protect against losses and possibly stimulate growth of brain cells.
- **Get regular exercise:** Exercise increases blood flow to the brain. This means more oxygen and nutrients reach it.
- **Heart-healthy = Brain-healthy:** It appears that your brain may benefit if you follow a heart-healthy diet. Limiting saturated and trans fats, eating fish, low fat dairy, lean meats, lots of fruits and vegetables, and maintaining a healthy weight is good for your heart. Many studies show there is an overlap between factors that are detrimental to the brain and those that play a part in other diseases like obesity, heart disease or diabetes. People with any of these conditions have a higher risk of AD. High "bad" cholesterol levels contribute to clogged arteries, including those in the brain.
- **Control diabetes:** Uncontrolled diabetes has a strong correlation to an increased risk of dementia. The high levels of blood sugars contribute to damage of blood vessels.
- **Eat a diet rich in antioxidants:** *Eating* foods rich in vitamin E and C (not taking supplements) are linked to lowering the risk of developing AD. Antioxidants are thought to protect the brain from damage caused by free radicals. Food sources of vitamin E include nuts, seeds, wheat germ, avocado and vegetable oils. Vitamin C is found in most fruits and vegetables.
- **Boost your B's:** Eat plenty of foods that are rich in B vitamins. Folate, B6, and B12 help keep a substance called "homocysteine" in check, which is believed to be a contributing factor in dementia as well as heart disease. For folate and B6, eat nuts, legumes, orange juice, bananas, whole grain cereals, dark green leafy vegetables, lean meat, poultry and seafood. You'll find B12 in animal products. All three B's are found in fortified cereals.

Following these simple guidelines will not only reduce your risk of dementia but also your risk for other chronic diseases.