

HOW TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF AVOIDING ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Elizabeth Beetham BSc Holistic Nutritionist, Natural Health Journalist and Wellbeing Expert shares her knowledge about Alzheimer's Disease



As I have just had yet another birthday, I admit that the one thing I fear most about aging and my future health is Alzheimer's disease. My eldest sister has had Alzheimer's for almost ten years and it is heartbreaking to see the deterioration in her. The question many of us want answered is, "What can I do to protect myself from getting Alzheimer's disease?" There are currently 500,000 people with Alzheimer's disease in this country; it is the most common form of dementia.

Alzheimer's is one of a group of conditions that all gradually destroy brain cells and lead to progressive decline in mental function. There is no cure but much research is at present being conducted and there is hope that within the next few years new treatments will become available to help sufferers of this disease. It is an awful disease and I really sympathise with anyone who is struggling with it and also members of their family.

Short-term memory loss can be a feature of the aging process and does not necessarily mean you have Alzheimer's disease. If you are really concerned then you should visit your doctor. As we age our long-term memory normally remains much sharper than our short-term memory.

It is often the case that older people can still remember vividly their school days but struggle to remember the names of people they met yesterday. This does not mean that you have Alzheimer's disease.

Experts now state that it is important to ensure that we use our brain to keep it working efficiently for longer, the 'use it or lose it' concept. The key to improving your brain power is to challenge your thought processes with puzzles and problems that require serious brainwork. Mental arithmetic, sudoku and crossword puzzles all help stimulate the brain. Watching television does not improve our brainpower, in fact researchers in Ohio, USA concluded that each hour of television viewing increases our risk of Alzheimer's disease and that every hour spent intellectually decreases the risk by 16%.

Research also indicates that 80% of the nutrients we consume are used by our brain, and therefore, if you want to improve your brainpower you need good quality nutritious food. Research by scientists at a Medical Centre in Chicago discovered that three portions of greens a day can keep memory loss at bay. Green leafy vegetables, particularly spinach, kale and lettuce, are beneficial because of their Vitamin

E content. Vitamin E is a powerful antioxidant which protects our brain and body. The protective, nutritional antioxidant function is also performed and enhanced by other antioxidants such as Vitamin C, the best sources being citrus fruits, and Vitamin A, (beta-carotene) found in carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli, mango, apricots and also the mineral selenium. In fact the benefits of all antioxidant foods cannot be overstated.

We need dietary fats to absorb Vitamin E and as I have mentioned many times the essential fatty acids found in oily fish need to be included in your diet. Further research has shown that children's concentration improves with Omega 3 fatty acids found in oily fish and this link has also been found to boost adult memory. I take a high quality Omega 3 supplement daily, called Super Omega 3 EPA, because of all the benefits it provides and it does seem to help my memory. See my website for details.

Finally, I recently read about a study where volunteers who were 65 and older were given a battery of memory tests and questioned about their weekly exercise habits. After six years, researchers detected a remarkable pattern. The volunteers who were physically active at least three times each week were 38% less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease, so do as I always say; move that body and keep your brain firing on all cylinders! To help improve your chances of avoiding Alzheimer's, stop smoking, avoid excess alcohol, exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet.

Live with joy and health.

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