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# Maintain Your Brain - Strategies to Help Prevent Alzheimer's Disease

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It's almost become a joke. Forget the word you wanted to use and joke 'Must be early Alzheimer's.' Lose track of where you left your keys? "Doh! Guess I'm getting Alzheimer's." Alzheimer's Disease is no joking matter, though, and we know it even under the casual, joking jabs at our own memory problems. I suspect that more than one of us, when those occasional lapses of memory happen, wonder if we really ARE starting to lose our memories to one of the most baffling and devastating diseases we know.

According to the Center for Disease Control statistics, 20% of adults who are in nursing homes have a primary diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease - over 214,000 people. For many of us who are approaching the far side of middle age, that's a frightening statistic.

Those jokes have the air of gallows humor. There is good news on the Alzheimer's front. Research into risk factors and predisposition have turned up some interesting correlations between general health, social well-being and Alzheimer's disease. The Alzheimer's Association has some suggestions that may help lower your risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease, and even slow its progression among those who have already started showing symptoms.

-- Eat your fruits and veggies.

Mother always told you to eat all your veggies, and this is one more good reason. In one study of over 1,800 elderly men and women, researchers found that those who drank fruit or vegetable juice at least three times a week had a 75% less risk of developing Alzheimer's than those who drank less than one glass per week. Why?

The answer probably lies in the effects of antioxidants. Fruit juices - especially berry juices - are among the highest sources of antioxidants around. Dark green leafy vegetables, tomatoes, berries and citrus juices are all up there as excellent sources of antioxidant goodness. Get out the juicer and drink up!

-- Eat a healthy, balanced diet - and don't forget your fats.

A healthy diet is basic to a healthy brain. Whole grains, vegetables and fruits should be your major source of calories, but doctors are starting to take a closer look at fats again. One source of fat that appears to be vital to rebuilding and maintaining brain cells is fish. The omega-3 fatty acids that are found in high concentrations in cold-water fish like tuna and salmon, as well as in shellfish, are an important ingredient in building neural pathways that function properly. Nutritionists suggest including a source of omega-3 fatty acids in your diet at least three times a week. Tuna casserole, anyone?

-- Get social!

In a study of over 2,500 men, those who had the least contact with friends and family were nearly 3 times as likely to

develop dementia as those who had more active social lives. Social activity and maintaining family and social ties seem to stimulate the brain cells and keep them from atrophying. When's the last time you had coffee with your sister, hm?

-- Exercise your brain.

Recent studies strongly suggest that elderly people - including those with Alzheimer's Disease, can improve their memories with practice. Researcher suggest that activities like crossword puzzles, memory games and challenging mental activities could help the brain create new neural pathways as old brain cells die off. Get out the word-search books and have some mental fun!

-- Stay physically active.

In one study of almost 500 adult children of parents with Alzheimer's Disease, researchers found that those who exercised regularly scored better on memory and problem solving tasks than those who were sedentary. It may be that exercise, which promotes healthy circulation and gets the blood flowing through your entire body, helps nourish the brain by getting more nutrients to it on a regular basis. Take a walk or take up swimming - or join a fitness group to combine social AND physical activities in one.

The bottom line? Doctors and researchers aren't sure what causes it, so there's no surefire way to prevent Alzheimer's Disease from developing. They do know that people who share certain traits are much less likely to develop the symptoms though. Stay fit, get active, get out with your friends often and do what you can to enjoy your life. As a prescription for preventing Alzheimer's disease, it sounds like a great way to live!

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