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**BOTTOMLINEPERSONAL** Editor: Karen Larson

## It Might Not Be Alzheimer's



### Some Brain Problems Can Be Cured

If a doctor says that you or a loved one has Alzheimer's disease, take a deep breath and get a second opinion. Studies have shown that between 30% and 50% of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's turn out *not* to have it.

*Bottom line:* The symptoms common to Alzheimer's can be caused by other reversible conditions. Problems with memory and other cognitive functions

often are linked to what I call MIND—metabolism, infection or inflammation, nutrition or drug side effects—or a combination of these factors. Addressing these can markedly improve cognitive function. Even people who do have Alzheimer's will see improvements.

### METABOLISM

Anyone who is experiencing confusion, memory loss or other cognitive problems should have tests that look at the hormones that affect metabolism. In particular...

**Thyroid hormone.** A low level of thyroid hormone often causes confusion and memory loss. It also increases the risk for Alzheimer's disease. In recent studies, thyroid levels on the low side in the normal range are associated with a 240% higher risk for dementia in women. Borderline low thyroid hormone is associated with as much as an 800% higher risk in men.

*My advice:* For most people with unexplained chronic confusion and memory loss, I recommend a three-month trial of desiccated thyroid (30 mg to 60 mg) to see if it helps. It is a thyroid extract containing the two key thyroid hormones. (The commonly prescribed medication Synthroid has just one of the two.) If you have risk factors for heart disease—such as high LDL cholesterol and high blood pressure—your doctor should start you with a low dose and increase it gradually.

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**Testosterone.** This hormone normally declines by about 1% a year after the age of 30. But in one study, men who went on to develop Alzheimer's disease had about half as much testosterone in their bloodstreams as men who did not.

Every 50% increase in testosterone is associated with a 26% decrease in the risk for Alzheimer's.

*My advice:* Men should ask their doctors about using a testosterone cream if their testosterone tests low—or even if it's at the lower quarter of the normal range. Limit the dose to 25 mg to 50 mg/day. More than that has been linked to heart attack and stroke.

### INFECTIONS & INFLAMMATION

You naturally will get large amounts of protective anti-inflammatory chemical compounds just by eating a healthy diet and using supplements such as fish oil and curcumin (see page 3). For extra protection, take aspirin. In addition to reducing inflammation, it's among the best ways to prevent blood clots and *vascular dementia*, which is as common as Alzheimer's disease. In addition, infections leave us feeling mentally foggy. Have your doctor look for and treat any bladder and sinus infections.

*My advice:* Talk to your doctor about taking one enteric-coated low-dose (81-mg) aspirin daily to improve circulation and reduce the risk for ministrokes in the brain. Even people with Alzheimer's may have had a series of ministrokes, adding to their cognitive decline. This is especially important when mental worsening occurs in small distinct steps instead of gradually.

### NUTRITION

The typical American diet is just as bad for your brain and memory as it is for your heart. Too much fat, sugar and processed food increase cell-damaging inflammation throughout the body, including in the brain.

In one study, Columbia University researchers studied more than 2,100 people over the age of 65 who consumed healthy foods such as nuts, fruits, fish, chicken and leafy, dark green vegetables and who limited their consumption of meat and dairy. They were 48% less likely to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's over a four-year period.

*Especially important...*

**B-12.** Millions of older adults don't get or absorb enough vitamin B-12, a nutrient that is critical for memory and other brain functions. You might be deficient even if you eat a healthful diet due to the age-related decline in stomach acid and *intrinsic factor*, a protein needed for B-12 absorption.

*My advice:* Take a multivitamin that contains 500 micrograms (mcg) of B-12 and at least 400 mcg of folic acid and 50 mcg of the other B vitamins. If you test low-normal for B-12 (less than 400 ng/ml), also ask your doctor about getting a series of 10 B-12 shots.

*Helpful:* Have one teaspoon of apple cider vinegar with every meal. Use it in salad dressing, or mix it into eight ounces of vegetable juice or water. It will increase B-12 absorption. *Caution:* Vinegar is highly caustic if you drink it straight.

**Fish oil.** The American Heart Association advises everyone to eat fish at least twice a week. That's enough for the heart, but it won't provide all of the omega-3 fatty acids that you need for optimal brain health. Fish-oil supplements can ensure that you get enough.

*My advice:* I recommend three to four servings a week of fatty fish, such as salmon, tuna, herring or sardines. Or take 1,000 mg of fish oil daily. You will need more if you're already having memory/cognitive problems. Ask your doctor how much to take.

**Curcumin.** Alzheimer's is 70% less common in India than in the US, possibly because of the large amounts of turmeric that are used in curries and other Indian dishes.

Curcumin, which gives turmeric its yellow color, reduces inflammation and improves blood flow to the brain. Animal studies show that it dissolves the *amyloid plaques* that are found in the brains of Alzheimer's patients.

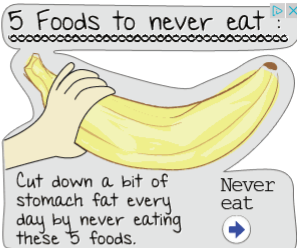
*My advice:* Unless you live in India, you're not likely to get enough curcumin in your diet to help, because it is poorly absorbed. Use a special highly absorbed form of curcumin (such as BCM-95 found in CuraMed 750 mg), and take one to two capsules twice a day. *Caution:* Taking curcumin with blood thinners can increase the risk for bleeding.

### TOO MANY DRUGS

Medication side effects are a very common cause of mental decline. This can occur even when you aren't taking drugs with obvious "mind-altering" effects, such as narcotic painkillers. Many drugs—antihistamines, antidepressants, incontinence meds and even

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simple muscle relaxants—can impair cognitive functions. The risk is higher when you're taking multiple medications and experience drug-drug interactions.

Doctors are far more likely to *add* medications than to *subtract* them. Many older adults are taking five or more medications daily.

*My advice:* Ask your doctor to review all of your medications. Make sure that you're taking only drugs that you absolutely need—not "leftover" medications that might have been prescribed in the past and that you no longer need. Then ask for a three-week trial off each medication that is considered necessary to see if those drugs are contributing to the dementia (substituting other medications or closer monitoring during those three weeks usually can allow this).

**Source:** Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, board-certified internist and founder of Practitioners Alliance Network, an organization for health-care providers dedicated to improving communication among all branches of the healing arts. He is the primary investigator on a nationwide study using MIND to treat Alzheimer's and dementia (410-573-5389 for information) and creator of the popular *Cures A-Z* app. Based in Kona, Hawaii, he is author, with Bill Gottlieb, of *Real Cause, Real Cure* (Rodale).