



What's Good for the Heart is Good for the Brain

Practical Steps You Can Take to Prevent or Delay the Onset of Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is an "irreversible, progressive brain disease that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills, eventually even the ability to carry out the simplest tasks" (National Institute on Aging). AD has devastating costs to the individual with the disease, his/her family and friends, and our society.

Am I at Risk for Alzheimer's Disease?

It is estimated that over 15 million Americans will have AD by 2050 (Alzheimer's Disease Research). Odds are that you or someone you love will be affected by AD as you age. Although the risk of developing AD increases with age, the disease is not a part of normal aging. Furthermore, although genes do play a role in the development of AD, having a history of AD in your family does not guarantee that you will have AD someday. The opposite is also true: just because you do not have a family history of AD does not guarantee that you will not have AD someday. *Everyone is at risk.*

What Can I Do to Prevent Alzheimer's Disease?

Although aging and genetics are two risk factors you cannot control, there are many simple lifestyle changes you can make today to decrease your chances of developing AD. If you have heard about strategies to improve your heart's health, you already know some ways to reduce your chances of developing AD later in life. You may already know that eating right and exercising can help you to prevent heart disease by lowering your cholesterol and blood pressure, but did you know that these same healthy behaviors could also help to delay or prevent the appearance of AD? The brain is one of the most active organs in the body. Your heart pumps about 20% of your blood to your brain, where oxygen and food are used. Any condition that damages the blood vessels in your brain or keeps your heart from pumping efficiently can deprive your brain from getting the nutrients it needs and stop new brain cells from forming. Obesity, high cholesterol and high blood pressure have all been linked to having a higher risk of getting AD. Both physical exercise and maintaining a healthy diet will keep your brain healthier as you age, as well as decrease your risks for heart attacks, strokes, and diabetes.

Are these Lifestyle Changes Really Worth My Time?

Even if exercise and a healthy diet do not prevent you from developing AD, you may delay the onset of the disease several years. You will also experience many other health benefits (such as a reduced risk for other diseases) and have improved quality of life as a result of these lifestyle changes. You really can't afford *not* to take a few minutes out for your health each day... the sooner, the better.

Easy Steps You Can Take to Keep Your Brain Healthy and Active:

- **Exercise.** Walk or exercise moderately for 30 minutes each day.
- **Maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet.** Eat brain-healthy foods and control portion sizes. A low-fat diet including vegetables, fruits, nuts, and fish is recommended for brain health. Some great options: salmon, halibut, walnuts, spinach, broccoli, and blueberries.
- **Keep your brain active** with stimulating activities like reading, crossword puzzles, and learning new things.
- **Socialize.** You can even enjoy others' company as you exercise.
- **Reduce stress and anxiety.**
- **Stop smoking.**
- **Talk to your doctor** if you have concerns about your memory, cholesterol, body weight, or blood pressure.

A few, simple changes to your lifestyle today can help to make your life more enjoyable in the future.