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NATURAL WAYS TO HELP YOU AVOID DEMENTIA

By Gemma Hurditch for CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine).

Dementia now affects three in ten people over 70 years of age in the developed world. Younger people are increasingly being diagnosed with the condition. Dementia is defined as a significant loss of intellectual abilities, often memory loss, to the extent where it interferes with social or occupational function.

There are different types of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is responsible for more than 70% of cases. The majority of other cases are linked to circulatory disease.

This type is known as vascular dementia, where there is chronic reduced blood flow to the brain. At least 10% of people diagnosed with dementia have mixed type - Alzheimer's and vascular.

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Dementia is not a normal part of the ageing process. Given that there is currently no medical cure for the condition, are there any natural steps that we could take to try to help ourselves avoid it?

Risk factors

The causes of Alzheimer's disease are poorly understood. Dietary and lifestyle factors, heavy metal toxicity, genetic variations, cardiovascular health and head trauma are all believed to play a role.

Vascular dementia risk is increased by all cardiovascular risks; high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and smoking etc. Diet and lifestyle is a major part of the equation.

Naturopathic approach

The naturopathic view of health emphasises prevention, and is based on the premise that all disease starts with disruption to the body's balance, including insufficient intake of vital nutrients.

A naturopath considers all the potential triggers for any health issue. These may be related to diet, lifestyle, toxins in the home/work environment, constitutional susceptibility and other factors.

Natural ways to address risk factors:

- Get your levels of homocysteine (a problematic amino acid) tested. If above 9 umol/L see your naturopath or nutritional therapist about a B vitamin programme to reduce it.
- Ditch processed foods for more vegetables and fruits, to normalise blood pressure and increase vitamins and minerals.
- Look up the details of a low glycemic load diet, designed to balance blood sugar and promote a healthy weight.
- Choose organic produce wherever possible to reduce chemical exposure and maximise healthful plant phytonutrients.
- Minimise red meat intake and aim for only grass fed, organic cuts.
- Eat oily fish 3 x per week; small mackerel, herring, anchovies. Larger fish may be too polluted with mercury.

- Consume turmeric to help reduce inflammation. Take half a teaspoon of the dried spice with some cracked black pepper to enhance absorption.
- Reduce inflammatory foods like sugar, dairy and processed grains. Replace with additional green leafy vegetables, fruit and nut smoothies, quinoa and brown rice.

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- Exercise five days a week for 40 minutes, a brisk walk is good.
- Sleep is important. Ensure good rest, away from your screens and devices.
- Maintain hobbies and social interaction - learning new things and keeping the brain active is protective and can compensate for loss of function in other areas.

A naturopathic practitioner can make you a personalised plan.

We can never be in complete control of our future, but for most of us, adopting a naturopathic approach can help improve our chances of a healthy and cognisant lifespan.

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