

Features In Focus

Protect Your Mind, Holistically

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Every 72 seconds in the United States, someone develops Alzheimer's disease.

Baby boomers are afraid. Losing one's keys or forgetting the name of a recently met acquaintance brings on visions of dementia. Seeing parents, grandparents, or patients with dementia causes the fear to grow.

Our minds contain many of the things we hold most dear: memories, intelligence, safety awareness, abilities that range from the most basic of physical, to the most sublime of creative. After honing our minds for a lifetime, who wants to lose what we have.

In Alzheimer's disease, neurons deteriorate. Plaques build up in the brain. Risk factors include age, heredity, sex (women more than men), and possibly overexposure to lead, mercury, and aluminum. Hypertension, high cholesterol, and poorly controlled diabetes may also increase the risk of Alzheimer's Disease.

Thankfully, in our lifetimes, we have seen care that is more humane for those with dementia, and even some options for treatment. Even better, research is showing that, even with genetic risk factors, there are things that one can do to prevent or delay Alzheimer's disease.

The bad news, for those wanting immediate gratification, is that you can forget the quick fixes. Research shows that lifestyle changes are the most promising ways to prevent or delay Alzheimer's disease.

Recommended lifestyle changes include increasing physical, mental, and social activity, smoking cessation, stress management, and adequate sleep, as well as reducing cardiovascular risk factors. Better nutrition management can also help.

Naturopathic doctors Erica Oberg and Laurie Mischley report that antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids, acetyl-L-carnitine, phosphatidylcholine, phosphatidylserine, vitamin B, and Vitamin E supplementation may help prevent or delay dementia. A 21 year Swedish study of 1449 individuals revealed "...a moderate intake of unsaturated fats at midlife is protective, whereas a moderate intake of saturated fats may increase the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease." Nutritional practices such as avoiding excessive calories and following general food guidelines are highly recommended. Polyphenolic extract (grape seed extract), as well as polyphenol-rich fruits such as apples, oranges, and bananas may assist with brain health.

Research shows that the herbal remedies ginkgo biloba, huperzine A, lemon balm, and sage may be beneficial in preventing or delaying dementia. (Oberg & Mischley, 2008).

Music may soothe the savage breast, but it also stimulates the brain. Most of the available research on therapeutic music was conducted with people already experiencing mild cognitive impairments. The Psychology Department of Willamette University found that after participating in 20 to 30 minute music therapy groups four times, participants experienced significant improvement in speech content and fluency. At Florida State University, a small study showed improvement in maintaining attention and eliciting social interaction.

Reiki has also proven to be effective when used with patients with mild cognitive impairments. A study published in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine in November 2006 indicated that compared to a control group, participants who received four weekly Reiki treatments showed statistically

significant increases in mental functioning, memory, and behavior problems.

So, put aside your fears, and take control. Stimulate your brain. Eat well. Consider using supplements and herbs, but fully research and seek professional guidance before you do. Quit smoking. Effectively manage your cardiovascular risk factors. Decrease stress in your life by listening to music or practicing Reiki.

Longevity is a popular health goal, but longevity with quality of life is the true goal. Start now - take care of yourself!

Gale Lyman, RN, HN-BC, CCM, CDMS, the founder of The Lyman Center, is a holistic nurse educator, a Reiki Master-Teacher, and a frequent speaker at Healthcare Review Symposiums. In addition to her work at The Lyman Center, Gale provides Reiki once a week to residents of a long term care facility. Contact Gale with questions and comments at info@lymancenter.com.