

Prevent Dementia Naturally

Dementia is not a normal part of the ageing process. In the developed world, dementia currently affects three in ten people over 70 years of age, with approximately 70% caused by Alzheimer's disease. Vascular dementia is caused by chronic reduced blood flow to the brain, typically as a result of stroke. It is responsible for 20-30% of dementia cases and can often coexist with Alzheimer's disease. At least 10% of people diagnosed with dementia have mixed type. There is currently no medical cure for dementia.

The overlap between risk factors for cardiovascular diseases such as stroke and Alzheimer's disease is important. Naturopathic preventative strategies look to uncover the "triggers" for disease, which may be related to diet, lifestyle, toxins in the home/work environment, constitutional susceptibility and/or other factors. Using natural strategies to reduce risk is vital for prolonged health and enjoyable older age.

The naturopathic view of health, which emphasises prevention, is that all disease starts with disruption to the body's balance, and that the two pillars governing health are toxicity and deficiency. It is for that reason naturopaths advocate the reduction of toxins in our everyday lives and eating a wide-ranging, healthy, balanced diet consisting of organic (ideally) whole foods.

High blood levels of homocysteine (an amino acid connected with unfavourable health conditions) increase the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and cardiovascular disease. Homocysteine is reduced by B-vitamins, so increasing B vitamins, in particular B12, B9 (folate), and B6, is a good step for protecting long-term health. B vitamins are water soluble and readily excreted so it's important to top up every day. This is one of the many reasons why you need a good

diet. A good quality food-state multi B-vitamin supplement can help boost levels. B12 is particularly important for vegetarians/vegans who may not get enough from plant foods. Keep an eye on homocysteine levels (tests are available). An optimal homocysteine level is 7–9 $\mu\text{mol/L}$; anything outside of that range should be addressed. Vitamins interact with one another; excess B9 can mask B12 deficiency (a further cause of dementia!). Seeing a naturopathic nutritional therapist to address your diet, and if supplementing, to get the levels and vitamin forms right for you, is best, as levels required for a therapeutic effect are often well above the recommended daily amount.

Boosting fish intake is also preventative. Studies have shown that fish eaters (as little as one serving per week) have lower rates of Alzheimer's disease and better cardiovascular health. Choose oily fish like sardines, small mackerel, and salmon; they are rich in healthy fats and vitamin B12. Flaxseed (linseeds) and walnuts are good vegetarian sources of oils supportive of cardiovascular health. Eat them fresh and unheated.

Avoid farmed fish (less nutritious and often polluted), swordfish, shark, flake or rock salmon, and Big Eye tuna, as high levels of mercury in these larger fish, from pollution in our seas, are toxic to the brain and other organs. Some medication and vaccines contain mercury. Many medications interfere with the absorption of vitamin B12 and other important nutrients. Pesticides, chemicals in products, processed foods, cookware, and smoking, can all contribute disease risk factors. Your naturopath can support you in reducing your toxic load.

Increase antioxidant intake, particularly vitamin E rich foods, as vitamin E is linked with reduced rates of inflammatory diseases such as Alzheimer's and cardiovascular disease. Try more sunflower seeds, almonds and spinach. Antioxidants reduce inflammatory processes linked to ageing

and tissue deterioration, including delicate tissues of the brain. Natural antioxidants are believed to prevent amyloid-beta deposition (Alzheimer's sufferers have deposits of this in the brain), so berries, brightly coloured fruit and vegetables, and raw nuts are all on the menu.

An estimated 50% of cases of vascular dementia result from high blood pressure (hypertension). Blood pressure can be reduced naturally by adopting a plant based diet. A higher ratio of potassium to sodium is effective in reducing hypertension. In practical terms, this means ditching processed, packaged ready-made foods and eating more vegetables and fruits. Ideally we would like a ratio of 5:1 in favour of potassium to sodium. Keep sodium intake low, check your packeted foods – stay under 1.5gm per day (this is the equivalent of about 4g of Himalayan salt which is our preferred salt). Avocado, spinach and tomato are all rich in potassium; bananas and potatoes are too, but are best taken in moderation due to their high sugar content. Steam or bake, do not boil your vegetables, as potassium and other nutrients will leach into the cooking water.

The DHA found in fish oil reduces blood pressure; a further reason why some people like to eat fish at least three times a week. Keep red meat consumption low; excessive iron in the blood is damaging to the body and linked to atherosclerosis/cardiovascular disease. Red meat, if taken, should be limited to once or twice per week and preferably are grass-fed, organic cuts.

Autoimmune inflammatory diseases of the arteries, such as lupus, can contribute to vascular dementia. Keep inflammation down to prevent additional problems. Turmeric taken either as a supplement or added to your meals can help reduce inflammation. Half a teaspoon of the dried herb taken with some cracked black pepper to enhance absorption, is a great start. Put it in savoury dishes or in warm almond milk. Brightly coloured fruit and vegetables are rich in

phytonutrients and antioxidant, anti-inflammatory compounds, so eat them daily. To avoid pesticide residues, opt for organic produce wherever possible.

Diabetics have two to four times the chance of developing cardiovascular disease and have increased risk of both high blood pressure and stroke. Keep your sugar and insulin down by investigating a low Glycemic Load (low GL) diet and maintaining a sensible weight. Being overweight in mid-life is a risk factor for developing dementia including Alzheimer's disease (although being overweight in late-life appears to be protective of dementia development). Lowered weight equals lowered blood pressure, too. Brisk walking for 30 minutes, five days a week is ideal to reduce weight and reduce stress levels, both of which are big contributors to cardiovascular problems.

Herbal Ginkgo biloba extract has been proven to assist with cerebral vascular insufficiency (lack of blood flow to the brain) and improve thinking, memory, and social behaviour. White willow *Salix alba* is used similarly to aspirin for blood thinning and anti-inflammatory properties. Aortic GAGs (glycosaminoglycans) 50-100mg per day have been used successfully to rejuvenate blood flow to the brain (available online or in health food stores) and can be used alongside certain blood thinning medication in stroke rehabilitation. An herbal or naturopathic practitioner can advise you on appropriateness and dose of these therapeutics.

Naturopaths acknowledge that physical, mental, and emotional needs must be met for abundant health. More than 20% of people with physical signs of dementia in brain tissue (post mortem) showed no outward signs of mental decline. Amazingly, keeping the mind active and engaged, through language, social interaction, and coordination tasks can help the brain to form new connections, compensating for the loss of function in other areas.



Whilst it is preferable to attend to risk factors in regards to the prevention of disease, and given that there is no current cure, what can we do from a naturopathic perspective if our loved one currently suffers dementia? Here are some therapeutic options to target problems associated with dementia such as memory loss, anxiety, restlessness, insomnia and depression, aggression, and loss of appetite.

Use Essential Oils

Try a few drops of pure essential oil in an oil burner, on the pillow or in the bath depending on time of day. Do not leave

an open flame unattended. Use lemon balm for cognition and to ease anxiety, lavender to combat aggression and insomnia, sweet orange to uplift the spirits and reduce aggression, and rosemary to enhance memory and stimulate appetite.

Keep the Diet Plant Based

Maintain a low glycemic load. Minimise processed packaged foods and stick as close to nature by purchasing organic, local, and seasonal wherever possible.

Increase Antioxidants

Taking vitamins C and E together reduces dementia risk and can protect from additional oxidative stress, thus slowing cognitive decline. Foods to include for vitamin C and E include red peppers, Kiwi fruit (with the skin on), broccoli, and other dark green leafy vegetables.

Take B-vitamins

Taking B-vitamins has been found to reduce brain atrophy and reduce homocysteine levels, which are linked to disease progression and cognitive decline. B12 and folate deficiency induce cognitive impairment, so be sure there are significant levels in the diet and include supplementation to boost levels. Thiamine (B1) at 3-8g per day has shown mild improvement of Alzheimer's type dementia.

Include Fish Oils

Whilst evidence has not been established for fish oils to improve health once dementia has been diagnosed, there is evidence that omega 3 oils help the brain to utilise B-vitamins to reduce the rate of cognitive decline in pre-dementia.

Try Drinking a Litre of Mineral Water Daily

The risk of Alzheimer's disease is higher in areas with higher aluminium (a neurotoxin) levels in the water (the main source of circulating aluminium in the body). The silica content in mineral water mops up aluminium, so look for high silica content brands, preferably in glass, as chemicals in plastic are deleterious to health. In one small study 35mg/L silicon in mineral water improved cognition in some participants and slowed deterioration in others.

Drink Cherry Juice

In a recent trial, 200ml daily of anthocyanin-rich (69mg per 100ml) cherry juice improved measures of memory and cognition compared to a placebo juice in mild-to-moderate dementia patients. Choose organic, unsweetened juice for maximum benefit from these phytonutrients.

Music Therapy

Listening to music, musical games, singing, and using musical instruments can all be beneficial to dementia sufferers in regards to behaviour and cognition. Background classical music or nature sounds can be very soothing.

Massage

Aggression, anxiety, and depression can all be reduced by touch-based therapies. Combining these therapies with aromatherapy may enhance their benefits.

Author

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Related Reading:

- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*
- *Candida, Gut Flora, Allergies, and Disease*
- *Crazy Pills: Over-the-Counter and Prescription Meds Linked To Dementia*
- *Mental Health, Physical Health & B Vitamins – Nature's Valium*
- *Gluten & Neurological Disorders – Understanding the Connection*
- *How to Detoxify from Vaccinations & Heavy Metals*

Related Products:

- B Vitamins
- Antioxidants
- Essential Oils
- Fish Oil