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Heart to Heart

With Philip S. Chua, M.D.

Prevent Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's, a severely devastating disease of the brain that, in an instant, totally robs and erases the person's memory, is a nightmare everyone fears. When it occurs, it happens so fast like transforming a well-lit room into total darkness with a flip of a switch. The entire memory bank is emptied, turning even a great, talented mind and a charismatic communicator, like the late President Ronald Reagan, one of the best presidents the United States has ever had, into a confused, non-verbal, totally dependent and helpless stranger, oblivious of his environment, his loved ones, and even of his own self.

The post-mortem pathology found among Alzheimer's patients is the abnormal and extensive build-up of beta-amyloid plaque in the brain, which damages the nerve cells and their connections, resulting in memory loss.

CGCG From Green Tea

A new study from the University of South Florida (USF) which came out September 2005, published in the Journal of Neuroscience, reported that high doses of an antioxidant ingredient in green tea, called epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), significantly reduced by 54% the formation of beta-amyloid proteins in the brain of laboratory mice that were first genetically induced to develop Alzheimer's for this particular experiment, and then treated with high doses of EGCG.

This substance is among antioxidants called flavonoids found in plants. Abstinence from red meat and eating a diet that is rich in vegetables and fruits are known to protect active people against heart attack, stroke and cancer.

Drinking Green Tea Not Enough

There are a variety of antioxidants in green tea, and some of these have been found to decrease the ability of EGCG to reduce beta-amyloid production. So, drinking green tea alone is definitely not enough to ward off Alzheimer's. There is obviously a need to selectively concentrate the EGCG antioxidant to override the negative effects of the other flavonoids in green tea.

More extensive studies in the laboratory are needed to confirm the efficacy and safety of EGCG, followed by clinical studies in humans, before we get the final word on this issue. But certainly, green tea is a healthier beverage compared to the

colas, alcoholic drinks and to the so-called “energy drinks” that are now flooding the market and are potentially dangerous to health, with their irresponsible and baseless claims.

Fatty Acids from Plants Show Promise

A fatty acid in safflower, corn, and sunflower oils may help prevent Alzheimer’s in some people, according to Sara M. Debanne, PhD, professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland.

“In people who did not have the inherited Alzheimer’s risk factor gene (ApoEε4), eating a diet rich in linoleic acids reduced the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease by about 50%. But in those who carried the disease-causing gene, linoleic acids appeared to raise the risk of developing the mind-robbing disease even further”, says the researcher.

Statins Against Alzheimer’s

Debanne says she suspects “the fatty acids’ cholesterol-lowering properties account for their protective effect in some people, since several studies have shown that the cholesterol-lowering statin drugs appear to ward off the disease.”

This research finding may be a good reason for people to get tested to find out if they carry the ApoEε4 gene.

Fish Fat Fights Alzheimer’s

New studies from the Louisiana State University’s Neuroscience Center of Excellence revealed that decosahexaenoic (DHA), an omega-3 fatty acids found in fish like herring, mackerel and salmon, etc., might help prevent Alzheimer’s. The DHA helps the brain cells by (1) minimizing the production of beta-amyloid proteins, and (2) increasing the production of another protein called NPD1 which helps the brain cells stay alive.

Previous researches have shown that people who eat fish at least 4 times a week, or those who take refined omega-3 from fish oil in gelcaps twice daily, reduce their risk of developing this dreaded disease, compared to those who hardly eat fish. A healthy lifestyle -- daily exercise, abstinence from tobacco, moderation in alcohol ingestion, low-fat, low-carb diet, like eating vegetables, nuts and grains, and fish **INSTEAD OF** (not together with) red meats -- significantly lowers the risk, not only for Alzheimer’s, but also for cardiovascular diseases and cancer.

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