

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Michiel Rorick

## Can Food Prevent Dementia?

*Recently, the first “Baby Boomer” became eligible for Social Security benefits. It’s difficult to imagine that the massive demographic of people born in the two decades after World War II is entering their Golden Years. As this shift occurs, it’s evident to holistic health-care providers like Dr. Rorick that now, more than ever, older adults are determined to remain active and vital.*



Fear of any type of cognitive decline, especially dementia, often outpaces concerns about other types of disability. While we can expect some health changes as we get older, dementia is neither normal nor inevitable. Dr. Rorick wants patients to know that there are simple steps they can take now to ward off memory problems later.

### What Is Dementia?

Dementia is defined as the loss of intellectual faculties, including memory, which interrupts social and occupational functioning. Dementia may be sparked by vascular problems, which curtail blood flow to the brain. Other culprits include brain trauma or injury — even if it occurred several years prior to the onset of memory loss.

Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is the best-known type of dementia; it involves the disruption of normal brain cell function. Two hallmarks of AD are abnormal amounts of protein plaques and tangles within the brain. These

usually affect brain regions responsible for learning and memory first.

The good news is that a large amount of research shows that certain dietary factors can determine whether the brain stays healthy in old age — or not (*J Nutri Health Aging* 2006;10:386).

### Go Mediterranean

Dietary choices for maintaining cognitive wellbeing may seem obvious, because they are often the same choices that ward off other diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.

The optimal ratio of lean protein (particularly from fish), legumes, fruits, vegetables and monounsaturated fat, mostly in the form of olive oil, makes up what is popularly termed the Mediterranean diet. Other characteristics of this way of eating include low consumption of dairy foods, red meat and eggs.

Dr. Rorick teaches patients that the Mediterranean diet is linked with a vast array of health advantages, including warding off dementia.

When researchers looked at health effects of the Mediterranean diet, they found a reduced risk of AD. The diet also slowed the progression of the disease in people who had already been diagnosed with AD. Lower mortality rates from AD were also noted. Stricter adherence to the Mediterranean



diet brought down mortality rates even more (*Neurology* 2007;69:1084).

### Keep Up the Variety

As an individual grows older, his or her food choices often become limited. This can negatively skew nutritional intake. One study found a direct correlation between eating a more diverse diet and superior nutritional status. Researchers suggest widening the variety of foods available to older adults in order to prevent health complications of all types later in life (*J Am Diet Assoc* 2002;102:1096-104). The study also determined that limited food choice correlates with an increased danger of developing health issues.

Specifically, the study found that eating lots of foods that are easily converted to energy, along with protein, increases the ingestion of vitamins D, B2, B6 and a host of other important B vitamins (*J Nutri Sci Vitaminol* 2004;50:184-95). B vitamins have long been associated with cognitive function. You can find plenty of B vitamins in foods like salmon, beef, eggs, peanuts, broccoli, asparagus, red peppers, spinach and romaine lettuce.

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## Care About Carotene

Another supplement to consider is beta-carotene — the pigment that makes carrots orange. As part of the landmark Physician's Health Study, researchers at Harvard University examined different aspects of health for 4,000 people over a period of about 18 years.

The study showed that people 65 and older who had taken beta-carotene for the entire length of the 18-year study scored significantly higher in tests for general cognition and verbal memory than a group who received only placebo (*Arch Intern Med* 2007;167:2184-90).

## Focus on Fish

Some ancient societies were convinced that eating fish boosts brain power. While this sounds like an old wives' tale, science is proving this concept to be accurate: More and more studies point to fish consumption as a key component of cognitive fitness.

Many types of fish contain large amounts of important fats known as omega-3 fatty acids. Scores of reports show that omega-3s can maintain brain health effectively, and even prevent dementia.

A new French study looked at more than 8,000 older people, adjusting the group for other dementia-influencing factors, and found that people who ate fish weekly reduced their risk of AD by as much as 35 percent. The study also found that the risk of developing dementia is raised by 50 percent if you don't eat fish or take fish oil (*Neurology* 2007;69:1921-30).

An earlier study had already determined that daily consumption of about 1 gram of a fish oil supplement is associated with a 50 percent reduction in dementia (*Am J Clin Nutr* 2006;83:1494S-1498S).

Most scientists now accept that omega-3 fatty acids are involved in the prevention of dementia, along with many other diseases and disorders (*J*

*Nutri Health Aging* 2006;10:386-99). We should be adding omega-3s to our diet in some form, perhaps as part of a healthy diet, which includes regular servings of fish (*Arch Gerontol Geriatr* 2007;44 Suppl 1:143-53).

One note of caution: Due to water pollution, many fish contain high levels of toxins and heavy metals, such as mercury and PCBs, which affect brain health. Larger, longer-lived species are most susceptible to contamination. Whenever possible, avoid swordfish, tilefish, shark, snapper and king mackerel, all of which are known to have high levels of mercury.

## Grab the Garlic

Garlic is another traditional ingredient taken for cognitive health. One animal study found that consumption of garlic, specifically aged garlic extract (AGE), actually stopped deterioration in the brain's hippocampus, the area which plays a key role in memory function. Researchers also concluded that AGE has the potential to prevent the progression of Alzheimer's disease (*Phytother Res* 2007;21:629-40).

And, researchers at Tufts University School of Medicine determined that AGE seems to offer neuronal protection, which can improve learning and memory retention. They conclude that AGE actually prevents cerebrovascular disease and lowers the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease (*J Nutri* 2006;136:810S-812S).

## Consider a Cocktail

One of the most intriguing suggestions for keeping dementia at bay is alcohol consumption. While chronic alcohol abuse is linked to the development of dementia, one or two glasses per day may bolster brain health.

French researchers found that light or moderate alcohol intake, between one and three drinks per day, may significantly cut the risk of dementia. The same study also showed a decreased danger of stroke, which is itself a major risk for vascular dementia (*Biol Res* 2004;37:189-93).

## Eat an Apple a Day

If you don't like to drink alcohol, you could substitute apple juice. An animal research project at the University of Massachusetts used apple juice concentrate to show that antioxidant-rich foods, such as apples, can prevent decline in cognitive performance related to aging and dietary deficiencies (*J Alzheimers Dis* 2006:287-91).

## Have a Coffee Break

Your favorite cup of joe may prevent dementia, too. Specifically, one animal study determined that drinking a moderate amount of coffee — about five cups per day — may delay or reduce the risk of developing AD (*Neuroscience* 2006;142:941-52).



## Putting it all Together

This chiropractic office is committed to helping patients achieve overall wellness. That's why we focus on teaching patients about nutrition and disease prevention. If you're interested in learning more about how specific foods and nutrients fight disease, ask us about additional educational materials and learning opportunities.

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