Editorial

# Alzheimer's: Can Our Nutrition Make It Falter?

**Mohsin Masud Jan**
Editor

Now, first of all let's discuss what exactly is Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's is a chronic neuro-degenerative disease that usually starts slowly and worsens over time. It is the cause of 60% to 70% of cases of dementia. The most common early symptom is difficulty in remembering recent events (short-term memory loss). As the disease advances, symptoms can include problems with language, disorientation (including easily getting lost), mood swings, loss of motivation, not taking care of oneself, and behavioural issues. As a person's condition declines, they often withdraw from family and society. Gradually, bodily functions are lost, ultimately leading to death. Although the speed of progression can vary, the average life expectancy following diagnosis is three to nine years.

That is the most basic textbook description of Alzheimer's there is. But, the main catch her is, we don't really know the cause behind this neurodegeneration. About 70% of the risk is believed to be genetic with many genes usually involved.Other risk factors include a history of head injuries, depression, or hypertension. The disease process is associated with plaques and tangles in the brain. A probable diagnosis is based on the history of the illness and cognitive testing with medical imaging and blood tests to rule out other possible causes. Initial symptoms are often mistaken for normal ageing. Examination of brain tissue is needed for a definite diagnosis. Mental and physical exercise, and avoiding obesity may decrease the risk of AD. There are no medications or supplements that decrease risk. No treatments stop or reverse its progression, though some may temporarily improve symptoms.

Now, moving on to the topic at hand, what I wanted to talk about today is whether or not a good healthy balanced diet creates any impact on Alzheimer's. From what little research we have available on this, I'll go through the main ones in this article.

The single, hottest nutritional discovery is that your risk of developing Alzheimer's is strongly linked to your level of the toxic amino acid homocysteine, which can be measured from a pinprick of blood on a home test kit. The lower your level throughout life the smaller your chances of developing serious memory decline. Homocysteine is a neurotoxin, capable of directly damaging the medial temporal lobe, which is the area of the brain that rapidly degenerates in AD. Homocysteine is easily lowered with inexpensive B vitamins.

Omega-3 fats are most prevalent in carnivorous, cold water fish such as salmon, tuna, herring and mackerel. According to a study by Dr Martha Morris and colleagues at Chicago's Rush Institute for Healthy Aging, eating fish once a week reduces your risk of developing Alzheimer's by 60 per cent.

Inflammatory reactions invariably mean increased production of oxidants, and hence an increased need for antioxidants such as vitamin A, beta-carotene, and vitamins C and E, all of which have been shown to be low in those with Alzheimer's. Other antioxidants, including cysteine, glutathione, lipoic acid, anthocyanidins, and co-enzyme Q10 and melatonin may also prove important. In simple terms this means eating a lot more fresh fruit and vegetables – at least six portions a day – and oily fish and seeds.

The herb Ginkgo biloba has also demonstrated potential memory enhancing effects in the elderly. While a systematic review of all research up to 2002 concluded 'promising evidence of improvement in cognition and function with Ginkgo,' three recent randomized trials on Gingko have failed to confirm earlier positive results for those with cognitive impairment, however one showed mild improvement for those who were not diagnosed with dementia. Ginkgo may therefore have a role to play in prevention. A recent review concludes that the results with ginkgo are 'inconsistent and unconvincing, but not dangerous, for dementia.'

On conclusion, at this point, we do not have enough research and scientific data to prove any solid link between a healthy diet and the slowing down or stopping in the onslaught of Alzheimer's, but, we do have enough data, that just might at such a relation. And for me, that is enough to urge everyone to clean up their diets, it might just help our brains in the long run.