

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Brain Fitness is Puzzling

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



Alzheimer's disease, now affecting close to 5 million Americans, is a malady for which no meaningful medical treatment as yet exists. So why is it that we hear precious little about actually *preventing* this disease that is costing us nearly \$100 billion each year? Is there really any good science out there, published in a respected medical journal, that would indicate that we can reduce our risk for getting this devastating illness? The answer, fortunately, is a resounding *yes*. I have the opportunity to visit with Alzheimer's patients and their families every single day in our clinic and with every patient I see I am utterly frustrated when thinking about the fact that this disease and all the emotional and economic hardships associated with it may be preventable.

Authors of a recent report, entitled *Dietary Intake of Antioxidants and Risk of Alzheimer's Disease*, describe their research which evaluated the dietary habits of 5395 individuals aged 55 years and older in comparison to their risk of developing Alzheimer's disease over up to nine years of follow-up. What they discovered was truly remarkable, especially when taken in the context of the incredibly large number of Alzheimer's sufferers in this country.

Essentially, the authors showed that those consuming diets richest in antioxidants had a risk of Alzheimer's profoundly lower than people with diets more deficient in these important nutrients. Specifically, those with a high consumption of beta carotene showed a 13% risk reduction for the disease, and the taking of vitamins C and E was associated with an 18% risk reduction, with substantially more risk reduction in smokers consuming these antioxidants compared to non-smokers. What's more, we're not talking about some exotic nutrient or pharmaceutical intervention.

So why wasn't this news? Instead, we are bombarded with advertisements for the latest "Alzheimer's pill." The research cited above was published by the *American Medical Association*, one of the most well-respected institutions in the country. In the final analysis, this is very good news for all of us, especially those with a family history of the disease. As we have learned with heart disease and diabetes and now with Alzheimer's, our nutritional choices can make a substantial difference in terms of disease risk. This new information certainly gives new meaning to the concept of "eating wisely."

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".