

# Alzheimer's Myths:

## What You Should Know About Prevention and Treatment

By Dr. Robert F. Baumann, Board-Certified Neurologist

**A**lzheimer's disease is unfortunately on the rise and is expected to triple by 2050. Currently, more than six million Americans have the disease. Unfortunately, there is a lot of confusion and misinformation about the disorder. When we think about the misconceptions associated with Alzheimer's disease, the number one issue that comes to mind is the use of the term "Alzheimer's." People seem to confuse Alzheimer's and label it for all cognitive disorders.

### **Myth: Alzheimer's disease is the same as dementia.**

Cognitive decline is classified as "dementia." Under the term dementia, are several groups, one being Alzheimer's disease. I tell my patients to think of dementia as the book title, and the causes and classifications are the book's chapters. These include frontotemporal dementia, vascular dementia, and Lewy body disease, to name a few. These have different implications and effects on the patient, primarily analytical, personality, and perception changes.

### **Myth: If my mom had dementia, I will too.**

Many patients come to me and are scared because one of their family members had dementia, and they think they will get it as well. Just because your mom or dad had it doesn't necessarily mean you will too. However, if you have a strong family history of dementia, meaning several family members have had it, or your relatives had it at a young age, then genetics might be playing a more significant role. We can test for genetic markers to see if you have a greater risk of developing the disorder.

### **Myth: Aluminum causes dementia.**

Years ago, people used to be overly concerned with aluminum cookware, soda cans, and deodorant. This is a common misconception that started back when kidney dialysis patients were experiencing confusion due to the aluminum-based hydroxide in the machines. Although this did cause confusion in some patients, it did not cause dementia.

### **Myth: Silver dental fillings cause dementia.**

The same can be said about amalgam fillings as aluminum. Many people clamored to their dentist, begging to have their fillings removed and replaced



with composite resin, but this myth has also been debunked. If you prefer to have your dental filling removed for cosmetic reasons, that's fair but not necessarily essential to prevent dementia.

### **Myth: Medications will reverse dementia.**

Treatment is an issue that many people are confused about. There is no meaningful treatment that cures dementia. There are medications that can slow the progression of the disorder. I am always upfront with patients about these medications, explaining they work for some people while not too well for others, but we always try them to see if there is any improvement. With these drugs, many patients' loved ones report improvements for several years, and the quality of life can be reasonably steady for five to eight years in some cases. However, as brain cells die, dementia will continue to progress.

## What you can do to prevent or delay dementia or slow the progression

### **Exercise**

Many patients with dementia have coexisting vascular disorders. Exercise is well known to mitigate cardiovascular conditions; therefore, we recommend exercise for dementia patients. Just 30 minutes a day of walking, swimming, or jogging, or whatever your fitness level allows is essential for cognitive health.

### **Manage insulin and sugar**

There is a lot of speculation surrounding sugar and insulin resistance and its role in dementia. In dementia patients, the brain cells are unable to metabolize glucose. Insulin resistance plays a significant role in dementia for numerous individuals. Limiting sugar and going into mild ketosis is thought to be helpful.

### **Healthy lifestyle changes**

The best thing we can do as a society is to take our healthcare more seriously. It begins with healthy lifestyle habits. I encourage my patients to start a Mediterranean diet and reduce sugar, alcohol, and unhealthy fats. Eating leafy greens, herbs, colorful vegetables, berries, nuts, seeds, olive oil, and cold-water fish is very effective for overall body and brain health.

### **Early treatment may be beneficial.**

In younger people who might start to show signs of dementia early on, beginning a dose of medications to remove amyloid plaque formation might be beneficial as well.



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