

Stop Dementia and Cognitive Decline... - by Detecting Early!

Dementia has recently overtaken cancer as the most feared disease by those over age 50. Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is the leading cause of dementia, terrorizing the lives of over 5.4 million affected individuals plus their families in the U.S. The direct costs to American society of caring for those with Alzheimer's and other dementias will total an estimated \$259 billion in 2017, according to the Alzheimer's Association. Not only that, the rate of AD is rising at an alarming rate, due to the so-called "silver tsunami" of the aging population. Currently, one in 10 people over age 65 has AD; and many more people with cognitive decline are probably undiagnosed.

Memory loss due to dementia is like erasing a person's "self" piece by piece. Over the years, I have seen so much heartbreak and desperation as family and friends watch their loved ones' personality and their mind evaporating away, year after year. By the time a person reached a definitive diagnosis of dementia, so many functional productive years have been wasted. So why wait? Unfortunately, traditional medicine and insurance companies only allow treatment when this horrible disease strikes.

Speaking of treatment, do you know that of the 244 experimental drugs that pharmaceutical companies tested from 2000 to 2010, only one, Memantine, was approved by the FDA, and as tests have shown, only produced very minimal benefits. Billions of dollars have been devoted to uncovering medications to either halt or cure Alzheimer's dementia without success. What we now realize is that there has been mounting scientific evidence to support that AD is not just one disease process. That's why drug trials and the race to the discovery on that "one magic pill" for AD had failed miserably (not to mention costly) over the past two decades.

So how many types of Alzheimer's are there? What are the causes of cell deaths leading to dementia? More importantly, what can we do to protect our brains? As professor Dale Bredesen, a clinical neurologist and an internationally recognized expert on neurodegenerative diseases summarizes succinctly in his new book "The End of Alzheimer's" published just this year in 2017, Alzheimer's Disease is "what happens when the brain tries to protect itself from three metabolic and toxic threats:

- Inflammation (from infection, diet, or other causes)
- Decline and shortage of supportive nutrients, hormone, and other brain-supporting molecules
- Toxic substances such as metals or biotoxins (poisons produced by microbes such as molds)"

Dr. Bredesen and his team of neuroscientists, after

thorough analysis of all the available scientific wisdom and evidence available, has identified 36 factors that are contributors to Alzheimer's destructive process to our brains (there are probably a lot more that have yet to be uncovered). Dr. Bredesen gave the clever analogy that, when you have 36 holes on the roof, you can't just patch one or a few holes! It is widely accepted by neuroscientists all over the world that Alzheimer's is a mid-life disease process, as early as one's 40s, that manifest in late-life. In other words, the neurodegenerative process often starts eroding the brain *decades*, not years, before the earliest sign of dementia begin.

So my next question is, how do I know how many holes are there in my roof? More importantly, which holes are the biggest so that I can prioritize what matters most? Can we/Should we find out where the leaks are before they get big enough to create irreversible damages?

The answer is: absolutely! The earlier the detection of your vulnerability, the better your chances are in guarding against this pervasive and terrifying disease.

Everyone's risk factors are different, as they depend on your genetic predisposition, lifestyles and environmental toxic exposures. Alzheimer's Association has listed known factors that increase your risk of AD besides your age, as well as including non-pharmacological therapies to maintain or increase cognitive abilities. However, there is no "one-size fits all" treatment strategy, simply because the causes are so widely variable. That's why "personalized medicine", that is, evaluating each person for his/her own individual unique set of risk

factors, is the forefront of dementia treatment.

Keep in mind, cognitive decline is not "normal" aging, but warning signs. The "Stay Sharp" program at AgeWell Brain Center utilizes the dementia detection protocol recommended by Bredesen's team. Neurologists who recognize these complex processes are no longer limited to matching each patient with a disease and prescribe medication only. In my practice, I believe that evaluating each person as unique individuals through examination including genetic risks, metabolic, lifestyle and toxic risk factors and therefore prioritizing treatment needs. Prioritizing a complete and thorough treatment is not only essential but critical to maintaining healthy brain function and to restore age-related cognitive decline.

Again, early detection is key to help your brain stay sharp, to keep your body vibrantly healthy, to achieve well-being and longevity, for yourself and for those you love! As a neurologist who is quickly approaching 50, I certainly have been trying my best to patch and safeguard against my leaky roof! Personally, I strive to achieve these life goals: Eat Well (not less), Move More, Stress Less and Love Deep; and I truly believe that the Stay Sharp program, designed specifically for you, will help you achieve and sustain similar goals.

Of course, one cannot discuss and explain the complexity of all of the 36 factors to neurodegeneration in one article. However, next month in the New Year issue, I will talk about some of the more common risk factors and what you can do about them.

