



FIRE IN THE BRAIN



By Stephen Weiss, MD, Holistic Medical Doctor/Classical Homeopath

Memory problems are a common complaint in my practice. The deficit can range from a mild annoyance, such as difficulty remembering someone's name or phone number, to severe cognitive impairment as is seen in advanced dementia. In addition to a decline in memory, a diagnosis of dementia requires that a patient also exhibit impairment in at least one of the following four areas:



- a) *speech or language comprehension*
- b) *abstract thinking, planning or organization*
- c) *object recognition*
- d) *motor skills (gross or fine movements of the body)*


These deficits must also significantly impair social or occupational functioning, and represent a significant decline over a previous level of functioning.

Most people mistakenly equate Alzheimer's Disease (AD) with dementia. It is the most dreaded form of dementia, perhaps because its incidence has been increasing steadily as our life expectancy rises. 1 in 8 people (13%) ages 65 and older suffer from AD—it affects a whopping 43% of those 85 and older. There is no one test which can accurately diagnose AD—it is a clinical diagnosis based on the criteria I have outlined above. Definitive diagnosis can only be made by pathologic post-mortem examination of brain tissue. A genetic test called apolipoprotein E (covered by many insurance plans) can tell you if you are at risk.

Although AD accounts for 60-80% of all dementias, there are many other conditions which can cause dementia, some of which are entirely reversible. This is why it is crucial that anyone with symptoms of dementia be evaluated promptly by a medical doctor (such as myself) to rule out treatable causes.

One of the most common treatable causes is known as "pseudodementia". When you remove the mask of this imposter, what you find is a condition all too common in society and in my practice—major depression. Successful treatment of the depression causes resolution of the dementia-like symptoms. Other causes of dementia include infections (HIV, Lyme Disease, Syphilis), heavy metal toxicity, vascular dementia (from atherosclerosis), hypothyroidism, deficiencies of Vitamins B12, folic acid and D, alcoholism, and prescription drug interactions. When a patient fulfills the diagnostic criteria of dementia and no other medical or psychiatric cause is uncovered, their dementia is labeled Alzheimer's.

A few years ago, I was interviewed by *Albuquerque The Magazine* about the epidemic of Vitamin D deficiency (see my website under "Media"). I like to test all of my patients' 25-hydroxy Vitamin D levels, since they are usually sub-optimal. My target is 60-70 ng/dl. I supplement them with one of my private-label products, **D-Light** (pun intended), a liquid, oil-based Vitamin D3, 1000 IU per drop, which allows me to carefully titrate their dose. Some people need over 10,000 IU a day. Did you know that you have to stop your Vitamin D four days before your blood draw to get an accurate reading? This was discovered by the medical director of one of our local labs after I called him perplexed by the results of bloodwork I had ordered. I knew that the scientific literature indicated that Vitamin D levels should rise by roughly 10ng/dl for every 1000 IU a day of Vitamin D3 supplemented, and the results did not reflect this. My call prompted him to scour the technical literature on Vitamin D assays, and test dozens of patients. He found that blood levels were highly variable unless their Vitamin D was stopped for four days.



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"I can't ever remember feeling as well as I do now." – S.D., Santa Fe

Is AD preventable? Dr. David Perlmutter, a Board Certified Neurologist and internationally recognized leader in the field of Integrative Neurology, believes so. He recently was a guest on the Dr. Oz show, where he discussed the treatment of AD with hyperbaric oxygen. In one study he refers to, people with high body fat followed for 27 years had a 293% increase in AD versus those with low body fat. In another, people who exercise regularly have a 40% decreased risk of AD versus their sedentary, couch potato counterparts. You've probably heard that the right fats are good for you. Here is a case in point. Fish oils with high DHA content, Dr. Perlmutter says, such as **MegaOmega**, (our enteric-coated high potency fish oil with no unpleasant aftertaste), reduce the risk of AD. He discusses the neurotoxicity of homocysteine, and cites a 2-fold increase in Alzheimer's disease in patients with high homocysteine levels. Lowering homocysteine "slows the rate of accelerated brain atrophy in patients with mild cognitive impairment," a precursor to AD. Homocysteine is easy to lower with nutritional supplements; in my practice, I use the product **Methylprotect**.

I'm sure you heard **the media hype** few years back discussing the dangers of Vitamin E. Most people don't know that the studies which indicate an increased risk of death from Vitamin E used d-alpha tocopherol, only one of the eight components of Vitamin E found in nature. There is new research which suggests that people with the highest levels of all 8 components of Vitamin E (4 tocopherols, 4 tocotrienols) have up to a 54% decreased incidence of AD compared to those with the lowest levels. In my practice, I use **Complete 8** to boost all of these components, which also protects against the ravages of cardiovascular disease.

Researchers have discovered that oxidative stress—the generation of free radicals within the body—is associated with the risk, severity and progression of AD. Oxidation leads to inflammation, "the mother of chronic disease". With a simple blood test, I am able to test the levels of lipid peroxides in patients, a good measure of how much oxidation is going on in their bodies. Elevated levels are treated with **Juice Plus+**, also available through my office. A University of Texas Health Science Center study showed that daily use of this supplement increased plasma levels of several antioxidants and lowered serum lipid peroxides in just 28 days!

Fortunately, most people who come to me with memory or cognitive problems are not demented, even though their spouses might disagree. Thankfully, their symptoms are far milder, but troublesome nonetheless. For years, I have tried various supplements from reputable companies, but have been uniformly disappointed with the results. When I learned that Dr. Perlmutter had formulated his own product to improve mental clarity and memory, I immediately ordered it and began recommending it to my patients. I was amazed at the results. Most patients experience a significant improvement in mental



clarity with the first bottle, and a portion of them report improvement in memory. I am fortunate to now carry Dr. Perlmutter's product in my own supplement line. I call it **Clear Mind**.

What really sets this product apart from the rest is the addition of Sulforaphane, a phytochemical found in high concentration in cruciferous vegetables, with powerful anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties. It also contains high doses of several antioxidants which are able to cross the blood-brain barrier, making it useful for both the prevention and treatment of AD as well. Here is some of the feedback I have received from grateful patients:

- A 46 year old PhD student with Chronic Lyme Disease: "**Clear Mind** helps me be more present. Concentration steadily improving. Memory is much better." After being on it 1 semester, she passed her Comprehensive and oral exams, and is now writing her thesis.
- Three weeks after starting the product, a 61 year old woman says: "I want to let you know that **Clear Mind** works great! I've taken it for 3 weeks, and had noticeable improvement since the first week with brain fog, clarity and multitasking."
- A 50 year old professional with Traumatic Brain Injury: "There is dramatic improvement in my cognitive function since starting **Clear Mind** and **MegaOmega**."



If you are ready to take the necessary steps to put out the fire that could well be burning slowly inside your head, call my office for an appointment or to pick up some of the outstanding products I have described.

You may find yourself more and more resembling a beloved animal who never forgets:

