

3 Strategies to Help Prevent Alzheimer's

New evidence of a link between Alzheimer's and heart disease may provide new ways to prevent the dreaded brain ailment, a top cardiologist says.

"The more we learn about Alzheimer's disease, the more similarities we find to heart disease, which should give us new ways to prevent it," Dr. Chauncey Crandall tells *Newsmax Health*.

It's estimated that 5.3 million people in the U.S. have Alzheimer's disease, including 5.1 million over the age of 65 and 200,000 over the age of 85. By 2020 that number is expected to balloon to 7.1 million, a 40 percent increase in less than a decade.

"While scientists say that they don't know the exact cause of Alzheimer's, there's growing evidence that this disease is caused by the same process that results in coronary heart disease," says Dr. Crandall, chief of the cardiac transplant program at the world-renowned Palm Beach Cardiovascular Clinic in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

Previous research has shown that the same risk factors that result in cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure, cholesterol and obesity, put people at higher risk for Alzheimer's disease as well as other forms of dementia.

These risk factors lead to atherosclerosis, and now researchers at the Washington School of Medicine in St. Louis find this process does occur not only in the cardiovascular system—which includes the heart—but in the brain as well.

Atherosclerosis occurs when deposits of cholesterol and other substances (plaques) build up in your arteries and narrow your

blood vessels. This process can cause heart-attack-causing blood clots, and may also lead to Alzheimer's by reducing the flow of blood that nourishes your brain, they noted.

The researchers used mice, as well as tissue samples from patients, and exposed them to cells to types of fats known to lead to atherosclerosis. They found that in the absence of a certain type of cell, ability to clear waste became dysfunctional and that this protein builds up in the brain.

They hope this finding could lead to new ways to clear this protein from the brain and lead to a new way to treat Alzheimer's disease, they said of their study, which appears in *Science Signaling*.

"Atherosclerosis not only causes clots to form that interrupt the blood flow, which causes heart attack and stroke, but it also results in a toxic situation that leads to inflammation, and there's growing evidence that inflammation may play a role in Alzheimer's disease, notes Dr. Crandall, author of the Heart Health Report.

"These findings give added weight to the brain-heart connection, and provide us with ammunition to show that steps to prevent heart disease also pays off in Alzheimer's prevention as well," he adds.

Here are Dr. Crandall's tips to protect both your heart and your brain:

1. Control high blood pressure. One-third of people with high blood pressure do not have it under control, putting them at risk for heart attack, stroke and Alzheimer's disease. Take your blood pressure medicine as directed and if you are not at goal, talk to your doctor.

2. Get active. Numerous studies find aerobic exercise is helpful because it increases blood flow to the brain. Get in the habit of a one-hour daily walk.

3. Reduce inflammation. Toxic bodily inflammation is linked to many diseases, including heart disease, Alzheimer's disease and diabetes. Here's how to reduce inflammation:

- Take low-dose aspirin daily. You may already be on aspirin therapy, but if you're not, ask your doctor about taking a dose of 81 mg.
- Follow a plant-based or Mediterranean diet. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables; get your protein from plant-based sources such as tofu, beans or cold-water fish such as salmon or trout; use olive oil for fat; and eat nuts and whole grains.
- Take vitamin C. Taking 2,000 grams of vitamin C daily will ease inflammation.
- Supplement with fish oil. Take 2,000 grams of fish oil, and make sure it comes from a high-quality source. If you are on both daily aspirin therapy and a blood-thinner, cut back on the fish oil if you notice bruising.
- Choose cherries. Fresh cherries or tart cherry juice is a natural anti-inflammatory.
- Drink fresh juice. Combining fresh vegetables in a juicer creates a healthful inflammation-reducing beverage. You can choose just about any colorful fruit or vegetable concoction that suits your taste.

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