

# Avoiding Alzheimer's

One in 10 people over the age of 65 currently have Alzheimer's disease.

**Question:** I was so saddened when former President Ronald Reagan fell victim to Alzheimer's disease. My uncle also suffered from this devastating disease. Can we do anything to prevent getting it later in life?

**S.K., Kalamazoo, Michigan**

**Answer:** Alzheimer's disease is the leading cause of dementia among the elderly. About 4.5 million Americans—one in 10 people over the age of 65—currently have the disease. Like President Reagan, people with Alzheimer's are eventually robbed of their memories and their ability to communicate with loved ones.

But God did not leave us to battle this devastating disease alone. Recent research shows promise in the area of prevention and in slowing the progress of Alzheimer's after it is diagnosed.

In a study recently published in the Archives of Neurology, researchers found that high daily doses of vitamins E and C taken together reduced the risk of Alzheimer's disease among the elderly. The study involved more than 4,700 adults age 65 or older.

In the first phase, 200 cases of Alzheimer's were diagnosed, and participants taking vitamin E and vitamin C supplements had a 78 percent lower risk of developing the disease than those who weren't taking supplements. At the end of the study, another 104 participants had developed Alzheimer's and the risk factor was 64 percent lower among the vitamin supplement takers.

Prior research has supported these findings. In two studies

published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers examined whether the intake of antioxidants is related to the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

In one study, conducted in the Netherlands, the dietary habits of 5,395 participants over the age of 55 and free of dementia when the study began were monitored over a six-year period. During this time, 197 patients developed dementia, of whom 146 had Alzheimer's disease. Of those free of the disease, individuals who had a higher intake of vitamins C and E in their diets had a lower risk of developing the disease.

In the second study—the Chicago Health and Aging Project—815 adults age 65 and older and free of Alzheimer's disease were studied for almost four years, during which each participant completed a food-frequency questionnaire. At the conclusion of the study, 131 people had developed Alzheimer's disease, with those not developing the disease having the highest intake of vitamin E in their diets. In fact, they were 70 percent less likely to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's than those with the lowest vitamin E intake.

Several biological mechanisms could explain this relation. Antioxidants may decrease the level of oxidative stress, thereby reducing the amount of DNA damage and the death of neurological cells in the brain. Also, because Alzheimer's disease is associated with both cardiovascular risk factors and atherosclerosis, a high intake of antioxidants could also decrease the risk of dementia by reducing the risk of atherosclerosis.

Specifically, to reduce your risk of Alzheimer's, I recommend taking a high-potency multivitamin-mineral supplement that includes:

**\*\*B vitamins (B6, 75 mg; B12, 100 mcg; folic acid, 600 mcg) to lower homocysteine levels.**

**\*\*Vitamin E (800 IUs in the d-alpha form). Be sure the label**

includes “mixed tocopherols” and also “tocotrienols.”

**\*\*Vitamin C (2,000 mg).**

Finally, make sure to include essential fatty acids (evening primrose oil and marine lipids with DHA and EPA), which help prevent inflammatory changes that might occur in the brain. DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) is also one of the key building blocks of brain tissue.

In addition to fish-oil supplements, cold-water fish—such as salmon, halibut, striped bass, tuna and sardines—are also a good source of DHA, an omega-3 fatty acid.

Alzheimer’s is a dreadful disease but not an inevitable part of aging. It is essential that we do our part and take advantage of the natural pathway God’s provided for us to keep our minds clear and focused.