

November 2012

## November: National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

### Can We Prevent Alzheimer's Disease? Research Provides New Leads

Will doing crossword puzzles prevent memory loss as we age? Does exercise delay or prevent Alzheimer's disease? Will adding fish oil to a diet help keep our brains healthy as we age? NIH recently convened a conference to answer these and other questions. The conclusion? Research so far has offered good leads about preventing Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive decline. Still, more research is needed before we can be sure what's effective. "Scientists are actively investigating a wide range of strategies," says Dr. Richard J. Hodes, director of NIH's National Institute on Aging (NIA). "Before we can tell the public that something will prevent Alzheimer's disease or cognitive decline, we want to make sure that the intervention is tested as rigorously as possible."

Alzheimer's disease usually affects people 60 and older, but people with a rare form of the illness can develop the disease in their 30s or 40s. The biggest risk factor for Alzheimer's disease is age, and the number of Americans over the age of 65 is expected to double to 70 million by 2050." While aging brains may not store memories or recall information as easily as they once did, many older people function well despite these changes. In fact, experience can help some older people perform certain tasks as well or better than younger ones. Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are definitely not, as people once thought, a normal part of aging. A handful of approved medications are available to help treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. None of the approved medications, however, appears to affect the underlying causes of the disease. Still, many of the healthy habits under study, like exercise, usually do no harm and likely benefit overall health. Smoking has been linked to a greater risk for dementia and cognitive decline, so if you smoke, try to quit. Chronic diseases, such as diabetes and depression, may also raise your risk, so be sure to address any long-term health problems. Despite all the challenges, Hodes says, there are reasons to be optimistic. "Technology is advancing our ability to identify the gene mutations that may place some people at greater risk for developing Alzheimer's disease. Scientists are developing new imaging tools to allow us to map the changes taking place in living brains. And we are moving closer to identifying the markers in blood that may signal disease onset, track its progress and test whether or not a medicine is working."

**Source:** *NIH News in Health*  
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### Did you Know?

In 1906 a German neurologist and psychiatrist named Dr. Alois Alzheimer first described the key features of the disease now named after him. He noticed abnormal deposits in the brain of a 51-year old woman who had dementia.

Researchers now know that Alzheimer's disease is characterized by brain abnormalities called plaques and tangles. Plaques are clumps of protein in the spaces between the brain's nerve cells. Tangles are masses of twisted protein threads found inside nerve cells.

### Caring for Someone with Alzheimer's Disease

Taking care of a person with Alzheimer's disease can be rewarding. It can also be challenging. Sometimes caregivers feel like they're on an emotional roller coaster.

A free 136-page handbook from NIH helps family members and others with the daily changes and challenges of caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

*Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease: Your Easy-to-Use Guide* from NIH's National Institute on Aging provides easy-to-read tips and advice. Topics include helping family members and others understand Alzheimer's disease, medical issues and medication use, getting help and finding long-term care, along with many other topics.

To view, download or order free copies, visit [www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/CaringAD](http://www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/CaringAD) or call toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

**Source:** *NIH News in Health*  
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<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2009/November/capsules.htm>

### Health Tip: For Healthy Aging

No treatments or drugs have yet been proven to prevent or delay Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline. But these healthy lifestyle choices and behaviors may help the aging brain:

- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables.
- Engage in social and intellectually stimulating activities.
- Control type 2 diabetes.
- Reduce high blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Don't smoke.
- See a doctor about mental health issues, such as depression.

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### Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease

#### Diagnostic Tests

There are no laboratory tests to confirm a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. However, your doctor will be able to do a thorough clinical evaluation and conduct tests that will provide a diagnosis with a relatively high accuracy rate, and other potential conditions will be ruled out. Initially, the doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history, and perform a physical exam. Tests to rule out other conditions may include:

•**Blood and Urine Test**—This may be done to rule out other causes of dementia.

•**Genetic Tests**—Offered for people with family members with early-onset Alzheimer's.

•**Neurological exam**—This exam tests the nervous system for evidence of other neurological disorders.

•**Psychological evaluation**—This is used to rule out depression or other emotional illnesses that may often be the first sign of Alzheimer's disease.

•**Neuropsychological evaluation**—This evaluation tests language, memory, reasoning, judgment, and orientation.

•**CT and MRI scan**

•**PET scan**—PET scan is a special type of brain imaging scan that involves use of special radioactive compounds.

#### Diagnostic Categories

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease usually falls into one of three categories:

**Probable**—This indicates that other dementia-related disorders have likely been ruled out, and that the symptoms are likely due to Alzheimer's disease. At least two areas of cognition are affected; one is worsening of memory.

**Possible**—The dementia is possibly caused by Alzheimer's disease. But, there may be other disorders present that may be the underlying cause of the dementia.

**Definite**—This diagnosis can only be made at the time of death through an autopsy, when a pathologist can study the brain tissue. This is the only way to diagnose the disease with complete certainty.

**Source:** Michelle Badash, MS  
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### Forgetfulness: When To Seek Help

People who have a sudden loss of memory or become very confused should get medical help right away. Make an appointment to see a doctor if you notice these symptoms:

- Asking the same question over and over
- Becoming lost in familiar places
- Not being able to follow directions
- Getting confused about time, people and places
- Not taking care of yourself—eating poorly, not bathing or being unsafe
- Having memory or concentration problems that concern you

**Source:** *NIH News in Health*

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<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2010/February/feature2.htm>

### Healthy Recipe: Grilled Chicken Topped with Berry-Peach Sauce

#### Ingredients

4 chicken breast halves, boneless, skinless (1–2 lbs. total)  
1 Tbsp. olive oil  
1 tsp. soy sauce  
1 tsp. fresh ginger, minced  
1 clove garlic, minced  
1 tsp. lemon juice  
½ cup raspberries  
1 peach, peeled and sliced  
2 Tbsp. apple juice  
2 Tbsp. maple syrup

#### Instructions

Rinse chicken breasts and pat dry. Mix olive oil, soy sauce, ginger, garlic, and lemon juice in a large sealable bag. Add chicken and seal. Refrigerate and marinate chicken at least 30 minutes or up to 8 hours. Blend raspberries, peach slices, apple juice, and maple syrup in a blender or food processor until smooth. Transfer purée to a small saucepan and heat. Keep warm. Heat coals or gas grill. Remove chicken from marinade and grill for 15–20 minutes, turning occasionally, until chicken is no longer pink in center. Spoon a little raspberry sauce on each of four serving plates and top with chicken. Drizzle with additional sauce and garnish with peaches and raspberries, if desired.

Calories: 208,  
Fat: 6 g,  
Sodium: 416 mg,  
Carbohydrate: 13 g,  
Protein: 27 g,  
Fiber: 1 g

**Source:** Healthways Inc.