

Health & Fitness

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Your personal brain management program

By Dr. James Proodian

Perhaps you have found yourself asking questions such as, “Now where did I put my keys?” or “What was that phone number again?” These and other brief lapses of memory are playfully coming to be known as “Senior Moments.” And while these episodes happen to all of us and are harmless, they do sometimes make us wonder if we are losing our mental capacity. Can better nutrition help preserve our brain and mind?

The answer is “Yes.” However, it’s not as simple as “Take two ginkgo biloba and call me in the morning.” A multifaceted, life-long plan needs to be put into action.

As a first step, you will need to be sure you are consuming the correct kinds of fats. For most of us, that means increasing omega-

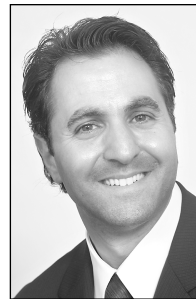
3 fats, such as those found in cold-water fish, flax, and walnuts, while at the same time reducing intake of omega-6 vegetable oils like corn, cottonseed, and safflower oils. Correcting your balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fats is crucial to brain health, and this is accomplished through dietary changes and, in many cases, using supplements. Avoiding trans-fats is another important step in this portion of the program.

Next, reduce your homocysteine levels. Research suggests that there may be a link between elevated homocysteine levels, and Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. Obviously, then, any brain-healthy program will need to include maintaining healthy homocysteine levels in the blood. If you do not know your homocysteine number, ask your doctor

about getting it tested. Treatment for high homocysteine generally involves certain B-vitamins.

Anti-oxidants help protect brain cells from the damaging effects of free radicals. It turns out that the brain is particularly susceptible to free-radical damage. Therefore, the next part of the program is to be sure you are getting enough anti-oxidants. Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources, although it may be necessary to supplement your diet with extra nutrients in this category.

Lifestyle factors are also important. Exercise helps stave



off cardiovascular disease, reducing blockages in small blood vessels supplying nourishment to the delicate brain cells. Stress management is another important aspect of maintaining a healthy brain. Chronic, prolonged stress can lead to elevations of the stress hormone cortisol. It is known that excess cortisol is toxic to a portion of the brain called the hippocampus, a key memory center, which leads to destruction of these brain cells. Thus, stress reduction helps control cortisol levels and can reduce damage to memory cells in the brain. Keeping yourself engaged in thought-requiring activities, such as puzzles or chess, may help keep your mind sharp as well.

Additional considerations may include using such supplements as phosphatidylserine, acetyl-L-

carnitine, ginkgo biloba, coenzyme Q10, alpha-lipoic acid, N-acetyl-cysteine, and others.

Of course, there are additional considerations when it comes to implementing your personal “brain management program.” Therefore, it is important to review your particular factors with a health professional knowledgeable in this subject matter before making any major changes in your current regimen.

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