



# Preventing Alzheimer's

Prevent and reverse effects of the disease through lifestyle habits.

**W**hile the lifetime risk of breast cancer for women is one in eight, the lifetime risk of Alzheimer's for women is higher, at one in five. Most of us have watched someone affected with Alzheimer's slowly fade away from being the person we knew.

No wonder an Alzheimer's diagnosis strikes us with fear.

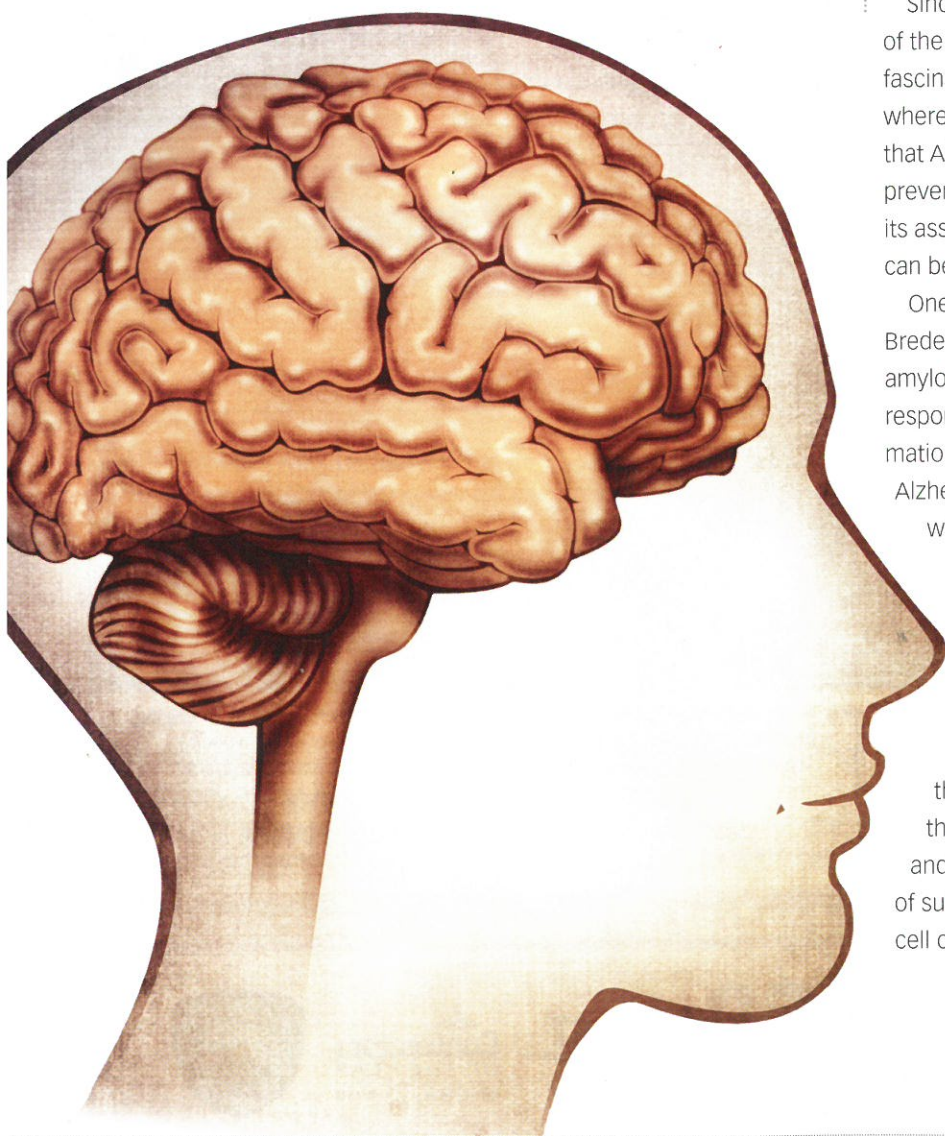
## WHAT IS IT?

People affected with Alzheimer's disease have the accumulation of a protein called beta amyloid, which adversely affects the normal functioning of the brain. Pharmaceutical

research has considered potential therapies that could interfere with the production of beta amyloid, but those approaches have not worked, or even made the disease worse. At most, current medications can slow the progression of symptoms for a time, but then the disease progresses.

Since the natural progression of the disease is bleak, I was fascinated at a medical conference where information was presented that Alzheimer's disease can be prevented, and, in many cases, its associated cognitive decline can be reversed.

One of the speakers, Dale Bredesen, M.D., discussed that beta amyloid was a natural protective response of the brain to inflammation and toxicity. He likened Alzheimer's to osteoporosis, where, as in osteoporosis, there is an imbalance in forces such that the breakdown of bone exceeds the formation of new bone. In Alzheimer's, there is a similar imbalance, where there is an excess of forces that cause nerve cell breakdown and death as well as a deficiency of substances that allow nerve cell creation and health.



This means that Alzheimer's does not have one cause. Rather, Bredesen published that there could be 36 or more causes and contributors. Each person at risk for Alzheimer's would have unique contributing causes and hence individualized lifestyle treatment plans.

### RISK FACTORS

Genetics play a role in Alzheimer's disease with the ApoE4 gene being the strongest genetic risk factor. If you have no ApoE4 genes, your risk of Alzheimer's disease by the age of 85 is 16 percent. If you have one ApoE4 gene, your risk increases to 30 percent, and, if you have two of these genes, your risk is increased to 50 percent or greater. However, even if you have two ApoE4 genes, it does not mean you will get Alzheimer's, but protecting your brain from the other 35 potential causes is critical.

It turns out that 25 percent of the population has the ApoE4 gene and this gene helps create a vigorous inflammatory response. It was a very protective gene in our early evolution when threats due to infection were much higher and someone who could mount a big inflammatory response against bacteria, parasites or viruses was more likely to survive.

In addition to inflammation, a decrease and shortage of supportive nutrients or hormones can be contributing factors to cognitive decline. Specifically, deficiencies in B12, zinc, CoQ10, omega 3, vitamin D, magnesium, selenium and glutathione can affect brain function. Suboptimal thyroid hormone, sex hormones and altered stress response hormones also adversely affect the brain.

One of the significant metabolic risk factors for cognitive decline is blood sugar dysregulation which leads to elevated glucose, pre-diabetes or diabetes. Elevated glucose levels alter proteins and cause inflammation.

### PREVENTION IS KEY

Over the past 20 years, my medical practice has focused on the identification and treatment of blood sugar dysregulation because its treatment is so critical to allow weight loss and maintenance of the lost weight. We have also focused on food sensitivity, as it causes chronic inflammation and illness in some people.

Investigating and treating inflammation is important for preventing and reversing cognitive decline. Identifying inflammation due to food, chemicals or infection allows these triggers to be removed or treated.

I left the conference energized because my practice has specialized in many of the areas that have been shown to help prevent or reverse cognitive decline. In fact, some of our patients have noticed improvements in memory as they followed our weight loss program. The addition of further specialized nutrient testing, testing for and determining the cause of inflammation, and genetic testing for those who want to know their personal risk rounds out an empowering program of prevention.

Understanding new personal health information is sometimes all that is needed to create new health habits. Other times, people need more support and accountability to create or change established lifestyle habits. As collective knowledge about brain health increases, support is available to help people create targeted and specific health habits that make a lifelong difference in their health and well-being. What is good for your waistline and your heart is also good for your brain. ☘

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