



Treating Dementia with Nutritional/Dietary Supplements

Helpful tips to understand the jargon and hype behind the promises



Dietary supplements, herbal remedies, special vitamin preparations, and diets have been marketed for the treatment and cure of Alzheimer's disease. If you Google "natural cure for Alzheimer's disease (AD)," a list of 394,000 Web sites will pop up. Many sites suggest their products have been kept secret by conspiracies in order to keep people sick. It is not uncommon to find people with dementia taking numerous supplements per day. Therefore, it is essential to understand some principles when selecting natural or alternative therapies.

Tip 1: Be Careful of the Advertising

Remember that nutritional or dietary supplements are not regulated by the FDA, thus unsubstantiated claims can be made that would not meet the standards required for a prescribed or regulated medication. What seems like research may in fact be "pseudoscience." This may include discussions of neurotransmitters and other brain chemistry that lead consumers to believe that controlled clinical trials have been conducted. Some examples of non-science:

- There is a difference between animals and humans for testing. To date there are no animal-tested successes that have worked in the treatment of people.
- Case reports are not research. People with dementia frequently have placebo effects, meaning they demonstrate improvement even when getting the "sham" treatment.

Be very wary if a "medical doctor" sells a product in a setting like the Internet. Most physicians tailor their prescriptions to meet an individual patient's needs. Be VERY careful of mixing products. Never give the person with dementia a product you would not be willing to take yourself. Beware that sometimes the label says pills contain an active ingredient but, when tested, they do not.

Tip 2: Nutraceuticals Are Drugs:

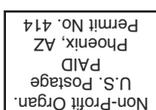
For Every Good Effect there is at Least One Bad Side Effect

Always purchase "pharmaceutical grade" supplements as they are purer and controlled for dose. All "Natural Supplements" can vary enormously in the dose of the therapeutic ingredient due to rainfall, soil conditions,

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Examples of Supplements Marketed to People with Dementia

- **Ginkgo Biloba** – In repeated clinical trials no positive effects have been found. People on anticoagulants, including Plavix and aspirin, should check with their doctor before taking it.
- **NADH or nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide** – There is some physiology that suggests nicotine might help with symptoms of AD, however, clinical trials of nicotine showed no improvement.
- **Acetyl-L-Carnitine or ALC** – This theoretically stimulates formation of acetylcholine but there are no reported findings indicating value of this substance.
- **Flower Essences and Rescue Formula** – There is evidence that smelling lavender oil helps with calming patients.
- **Co Q 10** – This is another "theory-based" supplement that to date has no real evidence showing improvement in dementia.
- **Combined supplements of vitamins B6, B12, & Folate** – This is thought to control homocystine levels. B6, B12 and folate have been tested in a large placebo controlled clinical trials in AD. No benefit was found over 18 months. It also may have made depression worse.
- **Axona** – This food supplement has failed in clinical trials.
- **Phosphatidylserine, DHA, fish oil, flaxseed oil** – All are examples of fatty acids have failed to show improvement in AD.
- **Huperzine** – is derived from a Chinese moss and is supposed to act similarly to that of the cholinesterase inhibitors.
- **Omega 3 and Omega 3-FA** – Some studies indicate potential benefit in improvement of symptoms of mild depression along with some neuroprotective properties.



(Treating Dementia with Nutrition Continued)

time harvesting, temperature, processing, etc. Always use a supplement with a single herb rather than a mixture of herbs.

When starting any supplement, it's a good idea to plan on evaluating whether or not it is working after two months. Does it do what you expect? If there is no outcome, then stop the supplement. Always tell your physician(s) what products you are taking. Bring a list or the actual supplements with you to a clinic visit.

Recognize that just like medications, supplements have side effects due to the medicinal properties of the herb and from fillers in the tablets. Your best ally is your pharmacist. Most of the national pharmacy chains have computer programs to help you understand what supplements are supposed to affect which conditions. They may also be able to help avoid any interactions with other medications that are being taken. Make an appointment to sit down with the pharmacist and consult on all supplements. An extra ounce of precaution may be all that is needed to assure safety when using alternative treatments.

Ask The Expert

Geri Hall
Clinical Nurse Specialist



Dear Geri:

I brought my mother to BAI for what I thought would be cutting-edge care. The staff treated us well as they diagnosed my mom with AD, provided prescriptions, and counseled me and my dad. No special diet or dietary supplements were recommended. Imagine my surprise when several friends asked me about the "natural cure for Alzheimer's disease." I went to the Internet and searched for Alzheimer's cures and treatments and found 1.2 million Web sites!

My friends laughed at my lack of sophistication assuring me there is a well-known conspiracy between physicians and pharmaceutical companies to keep people ill so they purchase expensive medicines. I am disappointed these cutting-edge treatments have not been offered to my mother. What is a family member to do?

Signed,
"Disappointed"

Dear "Disappointed,"

First, there is no conspiracy to keep people ill. Remember doctors and pharmaceutical employees have loved ones with dementia too and no one wants their family to experience Alzheimer's or the related disorders. A growing numbers of scientists have been working nonstop for years trying to unlock the complicated disease process that occurs in AD. Believe us, the news will report any new treatment or cure extensively in the press. At this point there are no known cures for Alzheimer's disease.

BAI has a very active clinical trials program studying more than 20 promising compounds that may hold answers to slowing the progression of AD. Consider having your mom screened to participate in a trial. The National Institutes of Health keeps an updated listing of all current investigational medications. To follow these medications, go to: <http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/results?term=dementia>

Nutritional supplementation and homeopathy are growing fields. We anticipate there will be new products marketed on a regular basis as people with dementia and families alike are desperate for any hope that can be offered. We encourage you to contact your physician or BAI to ask about products as they are introduced. This helps us to know what is being targeted and search for relevant findings to help you make informed decisions.

Signed,
Geri Hall
Clinical Nurse Specialist

Have a question?
To submit your question
for future consideration
email us at bainfo@bannerhealth.com

Our Mission

To end Alzheimer's disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families, and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research.

Tip on Brain Health

Eating whole foods such as lean meat, dark leafy vegetables, fruits and whole grains are better for brain health and function than most supplements. In addition, whole foods contain vitamins and minerals suspended in water, with a balance of fiber, essential fats, and other nutrients. Our bodies are able to absorb and metabolize the nutrients we eat more easily than the supplements we consume.

October Beacon Bits

Free Planning Ahead Classes:

It is rare to hear a caregiver comment, "I got help way too soon!" "Planning Ahead" is a 90-minute class designed to help families to think ahead about how to access help in the community, at home or in a residential setting. Families also learn how to pay for care. Here's what caregivers have said about attending this useful class: "This class was very informative. I now have great information and resources which will help me find the right help for dad." "The class along with the useful brochures and information will make it much easier to find help!"

Sign up now—Only 2 more sessions in 2010!

November 8, 2 to 3:30pm

December 6, 11:30 am to 1pm

BAI Third Floor Conference Room

To register, call (602) 839-6850 or email veronica.ellis@bannerhealth.com.

Want a Free Overview of Disease Progression?

COMPASS for Caregivers (Caregivers of Memory-Impaired People Acquiring Successful Strategies) is a free 90-minute class that gives a progression of dementia overview along with basic principles to enhance daily living for both the person with dementia and the caregiver.

November 4, 10 to 11:30am

November 18, 4 to 5:30pm

BAI Third Floor Conference Room

To register, call (602) 839-6850 or email veronica.ellis@bannerhealth.com.

Full-Day Workshop for Caregivers of Person with Dementia

MAPS (Memory Assistance and Planning Session) is a full-day in-depth workshop to prepare family caregivers to care for the person with dementia and care for self! Join us for the final 2010 MAPS workshop, on December 8th from 9 am to 3 pm at Banner Estrella Medical Center, 9201 West Thomas Road, Phoenix, AZ 85037. \$25 covers the cost of continental breakfast, lunch, instruction and materials.

To register, call (602) 839-6850 or email veronica.ellis@bannerhealth.com.

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For more information visit BannerHealth.org/AlzFoundation or call (602) 747-GIVE