



8 Classic Tips from a Healthy Aging Expert

While diets come and go, common sense and balance both work for most people. This is an older article, but because it was balanced at the time, this doctor's advice remains surprisingly on target:

Like many Alzheimer's advocates, I support increased funding for Alzheimer's research. The goal is to discover a cure. However, the current reality is that there is no sure way to prevent Alzheimer's and no cure in sight. *(edit: several years later, there are promising treatments, but as of now, there is no cure).*

Does that mean that there is no information available to help us? Absolutely not.

The 2014 International Alzheimer's Conference presented copious information about ongoing studies and other scientific data. These international researchers came away from the conference agreeing about many things. To me, the news that affects most of us is that lifestyle changes that we can make right now can have a major impact on how we age and how soon some of us will exhibit symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

The scientists presented studies showing that a healthy diet, moderate exercise, and an active mind can delay symptoms of Alzheimer's for up to ten years in one out of three people who develop the disease.

With this information in mind, I asked Dr. Bruce Daggy, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor in the Nutrition, Food, and Exercise Sciences Department of Florida State University, some questions about what we can do to help stave off cognitive decline and generally keep our bodies healthy as we age:

Q: Do you recommend any special diet to help preserve the brain?

A: To start with, that which is good for your body is also good for your brain, because your brain depends on a healthy body to function at its best. So, a diet that helps you maintain a healthy body weight and fully supplies your nutritional needs is the place to start. Supplements can help fill in the nutritional gaps between what our food intake provides and optimal levels of vitamins and minerals. There are nutrients that have been clinically tested in supplement form and found to support short-term or long-term cognitive function. One example is Omega-3 fatty acids from fish oil (especially the fatty acid DHA).

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There have also been other ingredients recently studied for cognitive benefits. These include true guarana extract (not the caffeine concentrate labeled as guarana and often found in so-called energy drinks), certain B vitamins, and, recently, certain plant molecules, called polyphenols, found in cocoa and in a particular Chardonnay seed extract. Sadly, drinking Chardonnay wine won't have the same effect!

Q: Your last statement probably brought some disappointed sighs, but we do want to try to do the right thing. What is your opinion on certain berries, nuts, or other “magic” foods when it comes to brain health?

A: I have a dislike for the characterization of specific foods as ‘magical.’ There’s too much hype backed by too little science. We need a foundation of a balanced, varied diet, rich in fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors. But again, it is true that getting everything you need from food alone can be a challenge.

Q: There are many conflicting studies about statins for cholesterol control, yet statins are widely prescribed. What is your opinion on statins, cholesterol control, and brain health...

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