

Can an Apple a Day Keep Alzheimer's Away?

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Contact Information

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Description

A study is finding a link between eating fruits and vegetables and reducing memory loss in the elderly. Researchers are also asking questions such as will cholesterol-reducing drugs protect memory and are people at a higher risk of developing Alzheimer's if they have diabetes?

Newswise — One of the largest studies of its kind in the nation is finding a link between fruit and vegetable consumption and memory loss in the elderly. Investigators from the Cache County Study on Memory, Health and Aging based at Utah State University are researching this, as well as asking questions such as will cholesterol-reducing drugs protect people from cognitive decline and are they at a higher risk of developing Alzheimer's if they have diabetes?

"We found that the group with the highest intake of fruits and vegetables scored better on the memory test than the group with the lowest intake," said Heidi Wengreen, a lead investigator on a study of the relation between fruit and vegetable consumption and cognitive function in the elderly. "It appears that higher intake of fruits and vegetables may protect against memory loss in older adults."

Wengreen said this study is the first of its kind specifically geared to dementia prevention. Wengreen's research involved analysis of data collected from more than 5,000 Cache County seniors, each of whom completed a standardized memory test up to four times over an eight-year period and answered detailed questions about personal dietary habits.

One of the largest studies of its kind, the Cache County Study on Memory, Health and Aging is a collaborative effort between researchers at Utah State, Duke University, Johns Hopkins University and the University of Washington. Started in 1995, the study has followed a large group of Cache County, Utah, senior citizens, investigating a wide range of health, lifestyle and environmental factors that may influence aging and memory.

Other Cache County Study findings revealed that men with diabetes may be at increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease but not women diabetics, the combined use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and antioxidant supplements can prevent cognitive decline, and use of statin drugs does not influence cognitive performance. This information was presented at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference on Prevention of Dementia in Washington, D.C.

Study project manager Nancy Sassano of USU's Center for Epidemiologic Studies said the continued participation of such a large number of Cache County residents has allowed the project to make significant contributions to scientific knowledge about Alzheimer's disease, memory and aging. Findings have been published in more than 30 professional journals and presented at numerous national and international conferences. "Our study participants really deserve a lot of thanks," she said.