
Homocysteine & Alzheimer's Disease – Could There Be A Link?

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Who doesn't know or has not known someone affected by Alzheimer's disease? Scientists think approximately four million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's and nearly half of the Americans 85 and older may have the disease. Malfunction of the blood vessels of the brain has been suggested to be a possible contributor to the development of Alzheimer's disease. Interestingly individuals at risk for heart disease and stroke, which are also blood vessel diseases, have been found to be at an increased risk for Alzheimer's. Elevated levels of homocysteine have long been associated with heart disease and stroke. There is now strong evidence that elevated levels of homocysteine also increases the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Homocysteine is not inherently bad; in fact, it is a necessary by-product in the break down of the "essential" amino acid methionine, which is found primarily in red meat and dairy products. However, as with cholesterol, homocysteine may lose its balance because of genetics or poor diet. According to the latest research, the main concern is having too much homocysteine.

The most recent data comes from a study published in the February 14 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. In this study, composed of 667 women and 425 men (average age of 76), the researchers found that baseline homocysteine levels predicted future development of Alzheimer's disease. Specifically, individuals with homocysteine levels greater than 14 μ /liter were at a substantially higher risk for developing Alzheimer's compared to those with a homocysteine below 14 μ /liter.

This is exciting news for two reasons. Homocysteine levels may serve as a means to identify some individuals at risk for Alzheimer's and elevated homocysteine levels are easily treated with increased consumption of green leafy vegetables or by taking the right combination of three important B vitamins: folic acid, vitamin B6 and B12. It must be cautioned that this study did not directly examine if lowering homocysteine reduces the risk of Alzheimer's disease. However, there is virtually no risk associated with the treatments to lower homocysteine, so why not minimize your risk as we await the results of future studies?

Ask your doctor to check your homocysteine level at your next exam and if it is elevated above 10 μ /liter, increase the green leafy vegetables in your diet and/or consider taking a multivitamin, which contains 400-800 mcg of folic acid, 400 mcg of vitamin B12, and 25 mg of vitamin B6. For more information about The Cooper Aerobics Center's multivitamins, Cooper Complete, [click here](#).

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