

## PREVENTING ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

How would you feel if you were diagnosed with mild memory problems, which could progress to dementia within just five years?

While there isn't much you can do about your genes, family history or age, you can improve your dietary habits. Research suggests a healthy diet may slow the progression of memory loss. It definitely helps control high blood pressure, diabetes and elevated cholesterol, which independently increases Alzheimer's disease risks, the most common form of dementia. So what constitutes a healthy diet?

- ▶ Adopt a **plant-based diet** and replace most or all of your meat and dairy with legumes, wholegrains, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. Dark-green leafy vegetables, such as spinach, and berries seem particularly important. One study found that placing older people (who didn't have dementia or memory problems but who did have several risk factors for heart disease) on a Mediterranean diet improved their cognitive function. Adopting a Mediterranean or vegan diet based on natural, minimally processed foods is a good step forward.
- ▶ Make sure you eat **nuts or seeds** every day. A higher intake of vitamin E from such food sources is linked with a reduced risk of dementia and Alzheimer's.
- ▶ Avoid **processed snack foods and fast foods**, which hide saturated and trans fats that are linked to Alzheimer's. Saturated fat is also found in dairy, meat products, coconut and palm oil.
- ▶ Get a reliable source of **vitamin B<sub>12</sub>** from supplements or fortified foods. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is essential for the brain and nervous system.
- ▶ Avoid supplements that contain **iron or copper** because excessive intakes of these minerals may contribute to cognitive and memory problems.
- ▶ Steer clear of **aluminium** cookware, antacids, baking powder and other products containing aluminium. While the role of aluminium in Alzheimer's disease remains controversial, some data suggest it may be toxic to the brain, even in modest amounts.
- ▶ Include **physical activity** like walking or resistance training at least three times per week. Studies suggest that this can protect against brain shrinkage and improve cognitive function.
- ▶ Other **lifestyle** factors that may benefit your brain include a good sleep routine and engaging in regular mental activity that promotes new learning.

