

Generations

Tips to reduce Alzheimer's risk

I turned another year older this week and although the earth didn't move for this occasion, my weekly edition of "Best on Line" news arrived in my inbox, very appropriate and timely since the first article was Sarah Crow's "40 Habits that Reduce Your Alzheimer's Risk."

And perhaps the first tip was the one I loved the most that kept me reading: Snack on some chocolate. No, she didn't mean to arm yourself with a Snickers or handful of peanut M & Ms.

Rather, one of the easiest ways to reduce your Alzheimer's risk is to add some high-quality dark chocolate to your diet. Chocolate is a good source of tryptophan, like turkey, which can help keep you mentally sharp as you age.

In a study published in the April 2000 edition of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, low tryptophan levels caused reduced cognitive capabilities among adults with Alzheimer's, suggesting that boosting levels of tryptophan-rich foods, like oats, dairy, chocolate, chickpeas, seeds, eggs and red meat, may be able to slow the disease's progression.

My personal favorite is very dark chocolate, almost bitter, so this was something that I could certainly do — as long as I kept it to one square a day, possibly two if I've been good all day.

Another attractive tip was to load up on red fruits. Researchers at Georgetown University's Department of Neurology have found that resveratrol, a phenol found in red fruits, peanuts, chocolate (there's that chocolate again) and red wine can help maintain the integrity of a person's blood-brain barrier, dysfunction of which has been suggested as a potential precursor to the onset of Alzheimer's. Love red fruits so this is doable, too.

No. 3 was to get at least seven

hours of sleep at night. According to researchers at the NIH's National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, a lack of sleep increases the amount of beta-amyloid — a protein linked to Alzheimer's disease — in the brain. In fact,



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just a single night of sleep deprivation shot beta-amyloid levels up a staggering 5 percent among study subjects. When I can, an afternoon nap is a luxury.

The next tip, lose those extra pounds, I've been attempting for decades and it never seems to get any easier. A review of research conducted at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 2013 suggests a link between obesity, energy expenditure hormone leptin, and Alzheimer's risk, so if you're eager to reduce your risk, there's no time like the present to start eating healthier and adding some extra exercise to your routine.

Another tip was to crack open a good book and get reacquainted with the classics you read long ago.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh schools of medicine and public health found that people who regularly engaged in activities including reading had a lower risk of dementia. *Jane Eyre* was my favorite, so it might be time to get reacquainted with the moody Bronte sisters.

Next, while *The New York Times* Sunday crossword might not be for everyone (I consider myself lucky if I get a couple of across/down boxes filled in), trying to tackle word puzzles with some frequency could keep you sharp as you age.

In fact, research published in the January 2014 edition of the *Journal of the International Neuropsychological*

Society revealed that people with dementia who regularly did crossword puzzles slowed their cognitive decline.

The next one, completing a jigsaw puzzle, I follow faithfully when I get some spare time. According to researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, recreational activities, including jigsaw puzzles, were associated with lower rates of dementia (plus concentration keeps your attention and eyes away from those late-night Pizza Hut commercials).

Now, the next tip surprised me: Get your ears checked. While regular visits to the doctor may help you catch Alzheimer's in its early stages, they can also help you remedy one of the more surprising precursors to the disease: hearing loss. According to a 2017 study published in *The Lancet*, untreated hearing loss can increase a person's risk of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

As far as diet goes, yes, there was a low-carb diet recommendation but the article also stressed the Mediterranean diet, which I've never tried.

Researchers at Columbia University have found a link between adherence to a Mediterranean diet and a lower risk of Alzheimer's. The diet is full of satisfying foods, like olive oil, nuts, salmon and red wine. Adding in the plus that it might actually help your brain as much as your waistline, it's definitely worth looking into.

My copy of *Mediterranean Diet for Dummies*, thanks to Amazon's Prime delivery system, should be in my possession by the time this column comes out Sunday, so I'll no doubt be pouring red wine at dinner.

For the complete list of tips, visit www.bestlifeonline.com.

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