

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

How often do you walk into a room only to find that you have forgotten why you are there? It happens to me frequently! Then you may start wondering, "Am I getting dementia?" I was relieved to hear that this is not necessarily a symptom of dementia. I like to think of it as a symptom of brain overload; we take on too much multi task and try to take on too many things. We also lose concentration and suffer from frequent bursts of day dreaming that interrupt everyday tasks. Surely it's day dreaming that keeps us creative; nothing wrong with that!

According to Alzheimer's Australia, most people with dementia are over 65 with 1 in 4 cases in those over 85. Although less common it has been found in people in their 40s and 50s. In 2005 there were an estimated 200,000 cases of dementia in Australia and this number is expected to climb to 730,000 by 2050 with some 1000 new cases diagnosed each week

There are many forms of dementia, the most common being Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for between 50% and 70%. The second most common is vascular dementia often caused by high blood pressure and thickening of the arteries. This causes circulation problems restricting blood supply to the brain and can result in strokes. There are also diseases such as Parkinson's, Huntington's, Pick's and Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease, which can lead to dementia. Dementia can also occur from consuming too much alcohol, particularly if the diet is deficient in thiamine (vitamin B1). Excessive drinking can lead to irreversible brain damage. If drinking stops there may be some improvement.

Dementia can affect memory, attention span, insight, emotions, physical function, planning, behaviors and language. If you have any concerns that these functions are deteriorating, there is a simple test that your doctor administer to diagnose dementia. It is important to get a firm medical diagnosis. Despite one or more of these functions deteriorating it does not mean that you have dementia. Early diagnosis of some forms of dementia can be very beneficial in preventing further decline, as there are treatments for some conditions causing dementia. There is also support, education and counseling available through Alzheimer's Australia on the National Dementia Help Line on 1800 100 500. You can also go to www.alzheimers.org.au to view Help Sheets.

The good news is that regular exercise can reduce your chances of developing dementia by 30%. A diet high in antioxidants is also beneficial. So make sure you get lots of fruit and vegetables, green tea, perhaps a little dark chocolate and the occasional glass of red wine (I've been advised that Pinot Noir is the highest in antioxidants). Make sure you exercise most days. Exercise your brain too with crosswords, sudokus, puzzles, learn a foreign language or a new card or board game. The term "If you don't use it, you lose it" applies to the mind as well as the body.

The earlier you start exercising and eating the right foods, the better your odds of reducing the chances of the onset of dementia. And, of course, don't smoke, because this leads to vascular disease (one of the major causes)!

Yours in health,

Jeni

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