

Diet and Dementia

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The relationship between mental health and food was discussed in detail earlier. Let's now try to see if food has an impact on the most heard and discussed disorder - Dementia.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is not a single disease, but a general term used for symptoms like, loss of memory, language, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia.

What causes Dementia?

Dementia is often caused by damage to the brain cells which, in-turn, is caused by variety of diseases. This damage results in impaired communication within the brain cells, which then affects all the activities related to the brain, like thinking, cognition etc.

Can Dementia be prevented through diet?

There is no fixed way or path that can prevent all types of Dementia. But health experts do not stay quite on this and strongly believe that by minimising the risk factors associated with dementia, one can prevent it in some cases, if not in all.

Experts believe that since, heart disease increases the risk of Dementia, hence, what's good for the heart is good for the brain, too. Here comes, the rightly termed 'Mind Diet'

The term Mind Diet has been rightly coined as it is a diet that is created by the researchers in Chicago which helps prevent dementia. MIND stands for, Mediterranean-dash Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay. In simple words, a diet which is based on Mediterranean diet and DASH (Dietary Approach to stop Hypertension) to prevent or delay the degenerative changes in the brain.

It is a combination of Mediterranean diet, which includes, whole grains, fish, pulses, fruits, and veggies and DASH diet, which includes the same foods but with the greater emphasis on reducing the total salt intake.

Let's simplify the MIND Diet and bring it to our daily practice:

Proteins - This includes more emphasis on plant proteins, that is beans, nuts on most of the days and other protein foods, like fish, chicken, once or twice a week. This way, it controls the total intake of saturated fats plus ensures more proteins, thereby making it good for the heart and brain.

Increasing whole grains and veggies - Whole grains give healthy carbs and B vitamins, along with veggies, particularly greens like spinach, kale etc, are great for heart and brain functions. Research is still on to understand how the combination of these two food groups work so well. So, include 3 servings of whole grains, like, whole wheat, whole grain cereals, millets every day along with veggies to keep your heart and brain healthy.

Include nuts and berries as snacks - These will work great, both, for heart and brain.

Olive oil - Rich in mono-unsaturated fatty acids, this oil is known for healthy heart but also has been shown to improve brain functioning.

Fruits - Include plenty of fruits, as per Mediterranean diet but MIND diet puts more emphasis on berries. The other fruits can be taken as 2-3 servings but as fruits and not as fruit juices.

Food to avoid in the MIND Diet

- ❌ Fried or fast food or processed food (avoid or less than once a week)
- ❌ Red meat (less than two times a week)
- ❌ Pastries and sweets (less than two times a week)
- ❌ Butter (less than one tablespoon a day)
- ❌ Cheese (less than once a week)

Does this diet work?

Research is still on, but when we look at this diet in depth, we can clearly see that it is a heart-friendly diet. In addition, this diet will help in reducing the bad cholesterol level and control obesity, as well. Since these both conditions are the high risk factors associated with Dementia, it makes sense that such a diet could prevent or reduce the risk of Dementia.