

The MIND Diet

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Bottom Line at the Top: The MIND diet is no guarantee of a dementia-free life. Focus on exercise and sleep instead. After a hard day of exercise, dance around the kitchen while cooking a prudent, balanced diet, then take a nice walk, then sleep.

Some live extremely long lives without a trace of dementia. Others are terrified that they won't. People accustomed to controlling their lives often believe they can prevent dementia through lifestyle modification and supplements, so they search for the perfect diet and magic pills.

American preoccupation with single nutrients and with cardiovascular disease combined to create approaches to dementia prevention using the superfoods concept and a plan called the MIND diet, standing for Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay. This plan combines principles of two cardiovascular disease prevention diets, the Mediterranean diet - huge amounts of green and other vegetables plus legumes, berries, nuts, olive oil, seafood and whole grains - and DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet, which is essentially the same but with low salt and an expectation of weight normalization.

There are some studies demonstrating improved cognition with the MIND diet in the aged, even if they had findings of Alzheimer's disease in their brain on autopsy (no diet prevents death). But there are at least two prominent studies, published in the New England Journal of medicine and the Journal of the American Society of Clinical Nutrition, in which the diet did not improve cognition compared to a usual diet.

Far more evidence exists for exercise maintaining and improving cognitive function (Mandolesi, et al. Effects of physical exercise on Cognitive Functioning and Wellbeing: Biological and Psychological Benefits. Frontiers in Psychology, 2018. 9; 509). Physical activity improves both the brain's structure and function, as well as recovery from damage. Given that that evidence is strong, I'm sad that many districts have dropped physical education from school curricula, and many

adults, if they use it at all, use physical activity primarily for weight control, rather than for general or mental health. If we don't want to decline, either mentally or physically, we should all exercise daily.

And Diet??: Cardiovascular disease prevention diets are not a bad idea for people who don't want to experience dementia because there is such a thing as 'vascular dementia', which results from the combined effects of deficits from multiple tiny strokes. The MIND Diet might help to prevent these. There are far worse dietary approaches to health than the MIND Diet. At the very least, it might keep one alive long enough to see if dementia intervenes.