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Understanding more about Alzheimer's

Scientists are still piecing together exactly what causes Alzheimer's Disease, but numerous studies are pointing at trends which do seem to be related to a lower risk of developing it. Maintain a healthy weight, paying particular attention to your waistline; under 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men. Consume a nutritious diet, avoiding processed & fried foods and exercise regularly. Finally, watch your cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar.

Exercising your mental "muscles"

Most advice for preventing Alzheimer's over the years has included mental exercises such as puzzles (crosswords, Sudoku), but more and more evidence is supporting exercise. What to do? The truth is, BOTH are helpful – and it's less about the intensity than the frequency. Aim for a minimum of 30 minutes per day of moderate activity, complemented by mental exercises that engage your brain – not passive activities such as watching television.

Good cocoa helps!

If you find making those "good lifestyle choices" difficult, then you'll find this one really easy to incorporate: hot chocolate. It turns out that a couple of cups of cocoa per day may improve blood flow in the brain, thinking ability and memory functions. All of these functions may help ward off dementia & Alzheimer's. But, make sure it's the good stuff – go for the pure cocoa rather than hot chocolate mixes that may be low in the necessary flavanols.

After cancer, one of the most-feared diseases is dementia/Alzheimer's. If you suffer from some memory lapses, don't assume the worst – and don't avoid assessment. For example, a study from Indiana has found that a specific group of drugs, anticholinergics (such as some antihistamines, sleeping pills, asthma or Parkinson's medications), can reduce cognitive ability – in as little as 60 days of regular use! Recovery may be as simple as discontinuation.

Talking to your pharmacist may unveil simple solutions to complex, worrisome health issues. January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month – and awareness is the key to solving problems.