

Exercise Not Enough to Prevent Alzheimer's Disease

Research has uncovered six core strategies involved in preventing Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Exercise, although a core prevention strategy, is not enough by itself.

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ABC News' January 16th story on preventing Alzheimer's may have led some viewers to conclude that regular exercise is all they need to prevent Alzheimer's disease. Unfortunately, exercise is just not enough.

"Preventing Alzheimer's and other dementias rests on a combination of six core lifestyle strategies," says Dr. Phyllis Staff, CEO of AlzheimersFree Press. Focusing on only one strategy will leave people vulnerable to developing dementia later in life."

The six core strategies include exercise, diet, a program of vitamin and herbal supplementation, regular brain stimulation, a satisfying work and social life, and a consistent spiritual practice. An effective program to prevent Alzheimer's includes all six.

"This is not to minimize the value of exercise. For people who exercise often enough and long enough, it does provide a degree of protection," notes Dr. Staff. "Research has shown dramatic differences in the later development of dementia between groups of people who exercise at least five times a week and those who exercise little or never. Exercising regularly is an important strategy."

However, a number of famous athletes, for example Sugar Ray Robinson (fighter) and Betty Swartz (distance runner), have died from Alzheimer's disease. Such deaths suggest that exercise alone may not be enough to prevent Alzheimer's.

Like physical exercise, mental stimulation and brain exercises, such as solving problems, puzzles, and games, are also important, but, by themselves, they may also fall short. President Ronald Reagan had problems to solve every day. He was highly involved in the world community and, presumably, had a satisfying, although stressful, job. Yet he succumbed to Alzheimer's disease.

Admittedly, the experiences of a few famous individuals do not prove the effectiveness of a particular strategy. Studies of large populations, such as the Swedish twins study, however, do show how effective they are. Such studies show that each of the six strategies plays a part in whether people develop dementia.

Individual differences, such as genetic tendencies, long-term exposure to environmental pollutants, and chronically high levels of stress, also influence the development of

dementias. However, it is possible to ease or even overcome individual differences by using a consistent program of prevention including all six core strategies.

Dr. Staff advises using a gradual approach to put each strategy in place.

"The easiest and most effective way is to focus on only one strategy for 6 weeks to two months," she suggests. "People should learn the techniques within that strategy, and practice the ones they find most appealing and effective. Once using those techniques becomes a habit, it's time to move on to the next strategy."

"After a year, all core strategies will be in place. The significant improvements these strategies create will not only prevent dementia but will also cut the risk of many other diseases associated with aging."

A video overview of the basic steps needed to prevent Alzheimer's disease is available for viewing on <http://www.alzheimersfree.com>. Both download and print editions of the newly released book, "128 Ways to Prevent Alzheimer's and Other Dementias," are available on the site.

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