

holistic healing

Connecting cognitive impairment with celiac disease

It's a nightmare of Homer Simpsonian proportions. Your doctor says you can never have pizza and beer again. Doh! Or no dough. This nightmare is a daily reality for celiac disease patients. They must eliminate gluten from their diets to avoid a variety of physical problems, including malnutrition and neurological complications.

When celiac sufferers eat foods containing gluten, it triggers an immune reaction in their small intestines. This reaction damages the villi, or small, fingerlike projections that line the small intestine, impairing the intestine's ability to absorb nutrients from food.

Researchers from the Mayo Clinic, led by Dr. Keith A. Josephs, theorize that a nutritional deficiency may explain why a cognitive decline occurs in some celiac disease patients. While much has been written about celiac disease and neurological issues, the Mayo Clinic research team was the first to establish a link between celiac disease and cognitive impairment, or dementia.

Their findings were published in the October 2006 issue of *Archives of Neurology*. The researchers followed 13 patients who exhibited cognitive impairment within two years of onset or exacerbation of adult celiac disease. In two of the patients, cognitive decline was reversed when they stopped eating foods containing gluten. Another patient's cognitive impairment stabilized after eliminating gluten from the diet.

"Typically, cognitive decline continues to worsen," Dr. Josephs states. "This is key that we may have discovered a reversible form of cognitive impairment." Further research is required to determine which celiac disease patients are most likely to experience cognitive decline. —Ellen Niemer

Fish oil and heart health

For many people, cod liver oil conjures up unpleasant memories of Mom—with bottle and spoon in hand—preparing to torture our taste buds. In Europe, however, fish oil is being prescribed for heart attack patients to improve survival rates and to reduce fatal heart rhythms.

Although researchers with the British Heart Foundation aren't sure how the omega-3 fatty acids contained in fish oil work, these fatty acids appear to regulate the heartbeat, reduce triglyceride levels in the blood, and prevent the formation of blood clots in the coronary arteries.

Fish oil is widely prescribed in Europe to treat coronary heart disease. In Canada a variety of omega-3 supplements are available at natural health stores. Alternatively, eat oily fish—salmon, mackerel, or sardines—twice a week to get your omega-3s. Remember to thank your mom—she's right again! —E.N.



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