



**DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

June 2025 Nutrition Article Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month

Alzheimer's is a specific degenerative brain disorder that leads to dementia. In fact, Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. The disease is named after Alois Alzheimer, the physician who described the brain changes linked with dementia, and he published a paper in 1906 regarding the observations of the disease of a woman he met in an asylum.

When Alzheimer described another case of this disorder in 1907, the condition was named after him. Sadly, the disease affects not only the patient it's inflicting but also their loved ones. Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month is observed in June as an opportunity to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and to increase both research and funding.

Throughout the month, the Alzheimer's Association — a non-profit voluntary health organization that focuses on Alzheimer's disease care, support, and research — encourages people to support the movement by wearing purple and training their brains to fight the disease.

Stages of Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease typically progresses slowly in three stages: early, middle, and late. In proper medical terms, these stages would be referred to as mild, moderate, and severe. Note, though, since Alzheimer's affects people in different ways, each person may experience dementia symptoms — or progress through the stages — differently.

The symptoms of Alzheimer's worsen over time, which, again, varies with each person. Official statistics reveal, on average, a person with Alzheimer's generally will live four to eight years after diagnosis, but it can be as long as 20 years in some cases. That said, changes in the brain related to Alzheimer's are known to begin years before any signs of the disease occur. In the early stages, independence is still possible. Despite this, memory lapses are common. This early stage is when close friends and family may notice small indicators: stumbling over words, forgetting names, losing or misplacing valuables, and having trouble organizing, among others.

The following moderate stage is typically the longest. It is here that the symptoms are more pronounced. They may confuse words, express anger, act out unexpectedly, refuse to maintain proper hygiene, and struggle to perform routine tasks without assistance. In the most severe stage, symptoms include loss of the ability to converse, inability to control movement, and the need for extensive care. Support services are likely needed at this stage.

Common Causes for Alzheimer's

While modern medical science is not much help (yet) if one already has Alzheimer's disease — other than to manage it — understanding common risk factors is important to help stave off the debilitating disease. Although scientists don't yet fully understand what causes Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, the common threads point to a combination of age-related changes in the brain, along with genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. Basically, Alzheimer's disease is a progressive brain disease characterized by changes in the brain that result in loss of neurons and their connections. By helping to prevent the loss of neurons and, subsequently, their connections, one can live to a ripe old age without developing the disease.

Older age does not cause Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia, but it remains an important risk factor, as well as the genetic components from our family (factors we cannot control). According to reviews of hundreds of published medical studies, behavior and lifestyle factors — like not eating a nutritious diet, smoking, consuming excessive alcohol, and lacking physical activity — that account for most other chronic diseases are also to blame for Alzheimer's disease and dementias.

It boils down to the condition of your blood vessels in relation to your brain health. The aforementioned lifestyle choices affect our blood vessels. And, remember, our heads are connected to our bodies, so, over time, this negative effect on our vascular system may set us up for Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease and Nutrition

No special eating pattern is specific to those living with Alzheimer's, but as is the case for diseases in general, good nutrition can ease some symptoms and help people feel good. When you're caring for someone with Alzheimer's, there are simple ways you can make eating healthier, easier, and more enjoyable.

First, the basic rules of nutrition will always apply. Not only is eating quality foods (those without synthetic ingredients like fillers, texturizers, and alternative sweeteners) a way to keep our brains healthy and prevent dementia, but it also helps ensure the development of no other chronic conditions that worsen quality of life. Eating a variety of foods is essential, especially fruits and vegetables, as well as quality whole grains, lean proteins, and dairy, ensuring a balance from all five food groups.

Visit dietaryguidelines.gov, specifically the chapter for older adults, to learn exactly what is recommended. As is the nutrition prescription for all healthy people, limiting added sweeteners and salt, in addition to staying hydrated, will always be key. Making sure the foods eaten are foods enjoyed – cooked and prepared in the easiest way to consume. All real food is healthy, so however it can be prepared and enjoyed is the most important.

Jaime J. Larese, MS, RDN, NBC-HWC is a registered dietitian, nationally board-certified health and wellness coach, and certified tobacco treatment specialist working in Montana. If you're interested in scheduling a nutrition consult with Jaime, visit: bit.ly/4d21owg.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Whole Wheat Pancakes

Pancakes can be healthy! Make a quality swap of the flour, and you won't know the difference.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1½ cups whole milk (or any milk of your choice)
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 cup diced strawberries or any fruit of your choice (optional)
- ½ cup chopped nuts or seeds of your choice (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix flour, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.
2. In a smaller bowl, mix the milk, eggs, and vanilla extract.
3. Fold the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients just until all the flour is coated and mixed. Do not over mix. Let sit for 10-15 minutes.
4. Fold in fruit and nuts of choice.
5. Pour ¼ cup of the batter into heated pan or griddle and cook to preferred doneness.
6. Serve with unsalted peanut butter for added protein and drizzle with pure maple syrup or honey. Enjoy!

