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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

‘Maintain Your Brain’ Diet May Avert Dementia

LOCAL ALZHEIMER EXPERT’S COACHING, DIET AIM TO END MENTAL DISORDER

BY KATHY UEK
DAILY NEWS STAFF

Nancy Emerson Lombardo lost her mother a little bit at a time to Alzheimer's disease. The Acton resident wants to prevent others from suffering with the dreaded disease which dramatically robs people of their memory and also affects other brain functions.

Armed with a Ph.D. from Yale University and 25 years experience working in the treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's Disease, Emerson Lombardo has developed a consulting practice, Health Care Insights, to help clients age in good health through lifestyle changes, including a brain-healthy diet.

She based Health Care Insights' recommendations on what she has learned working in the field of Alzheimer's as a co-founder of the National Alzheimer's Association, a co-founder of two Alzheimer's Assn. chapters in Chicago and Detroit, and from taking a prominent part in founding Alzheimer's Disease International. She also served as one of three scientific advisers for the Alzheimer's Association's new Maintain Your Brain program launched in 2004. She currently is at Boston University's School of Medicine as an investigator with the Alzheimer's Disease Center.

With a team of experts at Health Care Insights, she educates clients on how lifestyle changes, including diet changes, can reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease and help slow the progression of other forms of dementia. The lifestyle changes include physical exercise, mental stimulation, social involvement and brain-healthy food choices.

As part of the nutrition component, Emerson Lombardo helped to develop and counsels clients on the Memory Preservation Diet, which she says reduces the risk of Alzheimer's Disease and helps slow the progression of dementia.

Emerson Lombardo developed the diet in concert with medical specialists including Ladislav Volicer, a medical doctor in geriatric psychiatry with a Ph.D. in pharmacology.

"I believe that this diet would maintain or improve brain function in elderly individuals and would decrease (the) risk of developing Alzheimer's disease," said Volicer. "The diet may also slow down progression of Alzheimer's disease in individuals who have already developed it."

The diet also helps reduce heart disease, stroke, diabetes and moderate depression, said Emerson Lombardo.

The scientific evidence the diet is based on includes evidence from a

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Nancy Emerson Lombardo, right – developer of the Maintain Your Brain Diet – and counselor Val Nolen, left, counsel adults about foods that Lombardo's and others' research shows may avert Alzheimer's Disease and other types of dementia.

DAILY NEWS STAFF PHOTO BY ED HOPPMANN

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Maintain Your Brain Diet Aims To Avert Dementia

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variety of fields and medical disciplines, including Framingham Heart Study findings about the relationship between heart health and brain health, according to Paul Raia, Ph.D., director of patient care at the Alzheimer's Association, Massachusetts chapter.

"About eight years ago, the Framingham Heart Study starting carving out pieces of data and created the evidence of the important relationship between vascular disease and Alzheimer's," said Raia.

Others looked at other studies and research into nutrition, cognitive enhancement and social involvement and found the same strong relationship between their research findings and brain health.

"I think Nancy's work in the fields of nutrition, cognitive enhancement and social involvement, and bringing information together is part of the reason why this theory on lifestyle changes has caught on," said Raia. "She has brought people together who have been isolated in their research. They don't read the same journals, and she has pulled these people together in a variety of different settings, which was the basis for this paradigm shift. So many in the medical field are now accepting that what is good for your heart is good for your brain."

Keys to Maintaining Your Brain

Key elements of the Memory Preservation Diet include:

- Increasing the amount and variety of antioxidants including vitamins E and C.
- Increasing Omega-3 fatty acids, such as walnuts, flaxseed, fish or marine algae oil, and reducing the Omega 6 oils by using olive and canola oils instead of corn oil.
- Assuring that the diet consists of adequate levels of folates/folic acid and B vitamins, especially B-12.

The diet helps reduce insulin resistance, inflammation, LDL (bad) cholesterol and saturated fats and helps protect the heart, pancreas and other parts of the body, says Emerson Lombardo.

This is accomplished, she says, by following a diet in which most nutrients come from whole foods or juices, by adding nutrient-intense foods such

as berries, juices and nuts to control calorie intake, and adding spices such as ginger, rosemary and garlic to protect the body.

"All elements (of the diet) are heart healthy and brain healthy," said Raia.

And the Memory Preservation Diet is "one of four components of lifestyle changes that have been researched quite heavily, and results are very encouraging indicating that the right kind of nutrition that is rich in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory nutrients can slow oxidation that can cause various diseases that include Alzheimer's," said Raia.

What's oxidation? "Think of oxidation as rusting - which is essentially what it is," said Raia. "As molecules become damaged from the wear and tear in our bodies and the aging process, they adhere to other molecules that change their composition and cause disease in our bodies. It's like an erosion of molecules in our bodies."

Emerson Lombardo's Health Care Insights consulting service teaches individuals as well as community groups and provider organizations - such as senior centers, home health agencies, assisted living centers and nursing homes - what they need to do to protect brain health or deal with existing memory loss or diagnosed dementia in individuals or their patients.

"We work both with folks wanting to lower their risk of Alzheimer's as well as those who already have memory loss or dementia," said Emerson Lombardo.

The team strategizes with clients on the education and problem-solving piece while providing support, motivation and inspiration.

"We give coaching to help people actually make the changes and then maintain them," said Emerson Lombardo. "The coaching is done in person, over the phone and by mail."

Among the coaches are Val Nolen of Hopkinton.

"Both come out of the tech world of corporate America and are skilled trainers and mentors," said Emerson Lombardo. Both will work with Emerson Lombardo and both "already trained as cognitive educators working



Berries are among beneficial foods on the Maintain Your Brain diet.


with Dr. Lynn Serper, and both served as research associates on the now-finished Boston University research study of Dr. Serper's cognitive rehabilitation intervention." Nolen also continues on the Boston University Alzheimer's Disease Center staff as facilitator of the Community Advisory Council. Emerson Lombardo is also co-investigator on the Community Advisory Council at the B.U. Alzheimer's Disease Center.

The advice on diet and other lifestyle changes for brain health is not just for seniors, but younger adults, too.

"We think (Alzheimer's Disease) pathology starts decades before symptoms appear, so it is never too early to start interventions to minimize that pathology so it never gets to the point of causing symptoms," said Emerson Lombardo.

"I'm determined to help other people prevent this disease," said Emerson Lombardo.

For more information, see Emerson Lombardo's Web site at www.healthcareinsights.net, e-mail her at nemerson@rcn.com or call 978-621-1926.



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