

This Food May Prevent Alzheimer's!

A diet that is rich in the omega-3 fatty acids that are found in salmon and other types of fish could prevent Alzheimer's disease by thwarting the buildup of brain proteins, reports Reuters of new research in mice. The fatty acid DHA appears to interfere with the Alzheimer's plaques and tangles that form in the brain. Docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA, is a type of omega-3 fatty acid found mainly in fatty fish and to a lesser extent in seaweed, eggs, organ meats and DHA-fortified foods. These results confirm earlier studies in human beings that show people who eat more fish have higher blood levels of DHA and a lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

THE STUDY: Led by Dr. Frank LaFerla of the University of California at Irvine along with a team from Martek Biosciences Corp. of Columbia, Maryland, the researchers used mice genetically engineered to develop Alzheimer's-like plaques and tangles. When the mice were three months old, they were placed on one of four diets: --A typical American diet with low amounts of omega-3 fats and far higher levels of omega-6 fats, which are found in vegetable oils, eggs and meat. --A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids that was supplemented with DHA. --A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids that was supplemented with omega-6 fats. --A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids that was supplemented with DHA and omega-6 fats.

THE RESULTS: After nine months, the mice on the diet supplemented with DHA alone had lower levels of beta-amyloid and tau in their brain tissue than the animals in the other three groups, reports Reuters. Beta-amyloid and tau are the two proteins that cause the abnormal clumping in the brain that leads to the telltale tangles and plaques that characterize Alzheimer's disease.

WHAT'S NEXT? Clinical trials involving people with early-stage Alzheimer's is the next research step to confirm whether DHA supplements can slow the progression of the disease in humans. Martek, which makes a DHA product used in a range of infant formulas, foods and supplements, has launched just such a study. The study findings were published in the Journal of Neuroscience.



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