



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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"Alzheimer's Disease Update"

The Alzheimer's Association estimates that 5.4 million people suffer from Alzheimer's disease (AD). AD is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States and a new case is diagnosed every 70 seconds. AD is a devastating mental disease accompanied by language disturbances, limited ability to identify people or recognize objects, behavioral problems and personality changes. Despite years of research, the underlying cause of AD is up for debate and unknown. Current medications are being prescribed to treat AD, such as Aricept, Exelon, Cognex and Razadyne in up to 25% of AD patients but medical debates have raged over the questionable benefits of these drugs and their enormous costs. Actually, Italian studies have found that not one of the six clinical trials of so-called anti-Alzheimer's drugs significantly reduced the rate of progression from mild cognitive impairment (MCI) to dementia. I recently published a new book entitled, *Alzheimer's Disease: Forget Antioxidants & Supplements*, available at Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com. My review of AD revealed: "An increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease is associated with short arms, loneliness, big bellies, high uric acid levels, low oxygen levels, diabetes, low cranial blood flow, the herpes cold sore virus, low levels of physical activity and being overweight. Alzheimer's risk may be decreased by high oxygen blood levels, bilingualism, fruit and vegetable juices and increased physical activity. Several factors have been found to be of questionable value in reducing Alzheimer's risk, such as various herbal remedies, vaccines, and vitamin and antioxidant supplements." In short, we do not know what causes it or how to treat it. A February 2012 study in the online journal *PLoS One* reports that Alzheimer's disease spreads from one part of the brain to another like an infection and the abnormal tau protein linked to the disease travels along brain circuits, "jumping" from neuron to neuron. Technically, studies have shown that AD begins in the entorhinal cortex (memory), before spreading to other regions important for higher brain functions. Another new study shows "people who develop Alzheimer's disease late in life may have the same gene mutations linked to the inherited, early onset form of the condition." Yet, another new study suggests that a brain-clotting plaque (amyloid) linked to Alzheimer's disease may cause cognitive decline even in healthy people. This study is important because it adds to previous research that links higher levels of beta amyloid to cognitive problems. Still, AD cannot be prevented, cured or even slowed.

In the America that I love, hope never fades and research must go forward. The dreadful and destructive impact of AD on the individual, the family and society requires an all-out assault to find means to control this deadly and costly disease.

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