

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

August 30, 2015

“Brian Foods: Do They Exist ?”

Over five million Americans have Alzheimer's disease (AD) or some other form of dementia and those numbers will jump to 13.8 million by 2050. One in three seniors dies with (not necessarily from) Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia. Consequently, people are keen to adopt ways of decreasing their chances of dementia and to finding ways to improve function of their brain. False claims have been rampant with articles pushing the notion that this can be achieved with coffee, cocoa, water, antioxidants, etc. But, please do not accept a flamboyant, so-called medical headline. At the 2015 American Psychiatric Association annual meeting, doctors discussed how diet can influence mental health. Drew Ramsey, MD, assistant clinical professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons stated, "Food is a very effective and underutilized intervention in mental health. We want to help our patients have more resilient brains by using whole foods...by helping get patients off of processed foods, off of white carbohydrates, and off of certain vegetable oils." An article in *Lancet Psychiatry* claimed, "the emerging and compelling evidence for nutrition as a crucial factor in the high prevalence and incidence of mental disorders suggests that diet is as important to psychiatry as it is to cardiology, endocrinology, and gastroenterology." Emily Deans, MD, a part-time instructor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, said, "Hominid diets have changed drastically through millions of years of evolution. We started with plants, insects, and larvae; but around 2 million years ago we began incorporating meats into our diets, contributing to the development of the advanced hominid brain. Then, 1 to 2 million years ago we added tubers and bulbs. Finally, around 6,000-10,000 years ago, agriculture was developed and we added grains, dairy, and legumes to our diets." But over the past 100 years our diet drastically switched from a whole foods diet to one that is more processed and high in refined carbohydrates; that includes more vegetable fats rather than meat fats; and preservatives, emulsifiers, and other additives, which appear to have contributed to a decline in our collective health. Reportedly, grains and other foods have been processed and preserved for thousands of years, but by using much healthier means, such as fermentation of grains (letting them sprout) increases nutrient availability. Some studies have linked the Mediterranean diet (high in fish oils, nuts, and grains and including maybe a little red wine) with advantageous effects on neurologic and mental health.

In the America that I love, be circumspect of those with miraculous promises of increasing brain function with diet alone. Use your good ole' common sense. Please do not over react to every headline and alter your life style based on worthless studies.

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