

The Consumer's Guide to Understanding the Role of Elevated Cholesterol or Triglycerides in Dementia

How does lowering bad cholesterol and triglycerides protect me against developing dementia?

Abnormal levels of cholesterol and triglycerides are common health problems in the older population. Long-term abnormal levels of these two substances called “lipids” are associated with increased risk for heart and blood vessel disease. Most lipid lowering medications are called “statins”, and these drugs may reduce your risk of developing dementia in later life. Regular exercise, weight control, and a healthy diet may reduce lipid levels of at all ages.

Medications that reduce cholesterol or triglycerides may help to protect intellectual function by several ways. First, the large and small vessels in the brain may be damaged by fatty deposits in arteries resulting from long-term elevation of lipids. Lowering the levels of bad cholesterol and triglycerides may lower the risk of heart and blood vessel damage. Second, lipids may play a role in the accumulation of toxic proteins in the brain called “amyloid” and the anti-lipid medication may reduce these toxic deposits.

The best available science shows that high levels of bad cholesterol and triglycerides are bad for your brain. Persons with unhealthy lipids should exercise, eat a healthy diet, and take medications to lower the lipids. There is strong evidence that lowering your lipids will reduce damage to the heart and blood vessels that injures the brain. People with normal triglycerides and normal cholesterol should not take statin medications to protect against dementia because the risk of these medications is not worth an unproven benefit in persons with normal lipids.

Suggestions:

1. Eat healthy.
2. Exercise and control your weight.
3. Talk to your doctor about cholesterol and triglycerides.
4. Take your statins when you have unhealthy lipids.

How Does A Vitamin Supplement For B-Complex Or Folic Acid Help Blood Vessels?

Scientists have learned that a certain molecule, called “homocysteine (homo-sis-teen)”, may be elevated in the blood when a person has a low level of vitamins B6, B12, or folic acid. Elevated homocysteine in some older individuals may increase the risk for stroke, blood vessel damage, and perhaps dementia. Most people who eat a normal diet will consume enough B-vitamins and folic acid to protect their heart and blood vessels. Some people need extra vitamins.

Vitamins B6, B12, and folic acid are commonly included in most inexpensive, over-the-counter vitamin supplements. People who take a standard vitamin dosage should not have side effects or complications from taking this medication. In this instance, it is better to be “safe than sorry”. We encourage all middle-aged and older persons to take a vitamin that includes B-vitamins and folic acid in order to reduce the risk of vascular disease. The vitamin does not assure protection; however, it is a simple step that can be taken to reduce a risk.

Recommendations:

1. Eat a balanced, healthy diet.
2. Take an over-the-counter vitamin that includes folic acid and B-complex vitamins.
3. Reduce other risk factors for heart and blood vessel disease.