

Innovative nutrition program wins award

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) recently received the American Dietetic Association's prestigious 2002 President's Circle Nutrition Education Award. The award recognizes "the development and dissemination of scientifically sound nutrition information that is unique in concept, creative in presentation and free from specific commercial message or endorsement."

"With the New American Plate, AICR has distilled a number of vital health messages into a highly visual presentation that speaks to people in a simple, intuitive way," said ADA President Julie O'Sullivan Mallett. "This campaign combines the latest science, a memorable, striking design, and a dose of old-fashioned common sense to simultaneously address short-term goals like weight management and long-term goals like the prevention of chronic disease."

In such an environment, AICR developed a simple approach that makes it easier than ever to eat for lower risk of cancer and other chronic diseases. At the same time, the campaign combats the obesity epidemic by refocusing attention on the notion of portion size, and providing tools for adapting personal portions to suit individual caloric needs.

The simple advice: Take a look at your plate. Make sure that vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans occupy two-thirds (or more) of the plate, while animal-based foods cover one-third (or less).

Meals that are composed according to the New American Plate tend to "push" high-fat, high-calorie items to the periphery in favor of plant foods that contain protective fiber and phytochemicals. Such cancer-protective, heart-healthy meals also help keep weight gain in check.

In accepting the award, AICR Vice President for Education and Communications Jeff Prince outlined the New American Plate's beginning.

"The knowledge that healthy diets could lower cancer risk was driven home by AICR's 1997 Expert Report, which analyzed over 4,500 studies," he said. "That report showed that our everyday choices have a dramatic impact on our risk for cancer, and went on to stress the importance of a healthy weight, regular exercise and diet high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans."

Just three years after that report was published, however, American obesity rates had reached an all-time high, and the bestseller lists were thronged with "quick fix" diets. Experts at AICR grew concerned because many of these fad diets advocated cutting back on vegetables and fruits — the very same components of the diet that have been shown to be the strongest cancer-fighters.

"At the same time, American portion sizes — in restaurants and in home — had steadily ballooned. The common-sense notion of portion control was all but abandoned in light of the murky promises made by fad diets."

"There's nothing to count or measure," said Prince. "The program involves a simple rule-of-thumb that helps people eat for both weight management and reduced risk for chronic disease."

Since the New American Plate campaign was launched in September 2000, over one million individuals have requested the brochure. Subsequent brochures in the New American Plate series, titled *One-Pot Meals*, *Comfort Foods* and *Vegetables*, have proven equally popular.

To order New American Plate materials, call AICR at 1-800-843-8114 Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The text of all four brochures in the New American Plate series can be downloaded from the AICR Web site at www.aicr.org.

The American Institute for Cancer Research is the nation's third largest cancer charity, focusing exclusively on the link between diet and cancer. The institute provides a wide range of education programs that help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. AICR also support research in cancer prevention and treatment at universities, hospitals and research centers across the United States.

Brain researchers investigate use-it-or-lose-it theory

BY DANIEL G. HANEY
AP MEDICAL EDITOR

Maybe it would be going a bit far to suggest that reading this news article will keep you from getting Alzheimer's disease.

But why take a chance? Keep going, and you will encounter the latest ideas about Alzheimer's prevention. You will absorb a few unfamiliar words. You will follow the back-and-forth about what experts know and wish they knew. In short, you will probably learn something.

In theory, learning is good for the brain, especially old brains, although of course it is no guarantee, since plenty of newspaper readers get Alzheimer's. But staying mentally active, whether working a crossword puzzle or composing a symphony, might help forestall the worst by building up a reserve of mental circuits that keep thoughts flowing smoothly even when this awful disease takes root.

The use-it-or-lose-it theory — and it's only that, a theory — is one of many being investigated by brain researchers seeking ways to delay or perhaps even prevent the onset of Alzheimer's disease. They suspect that the way people live, the pills they take, even the way they think may influence their risk of the disease.

Much of the work involves the hunt for mind-protecting medicines, but new

ones are years away from routine use. In the meantime, scientists hope to prove good solutions are already in the medicine cabinet. The possibilities include such familiar items as vitamin E, cholesterol pills, anti-inflammatory painkillers, estrogen, folate and pink peppercorn.

That's a big change. Until recently, the suggestion that garden-variety elderly dementia might actually be preventable seemed silly, since it was assumed to be an inevitable consequence of aging.

Difficult as the goal may be, many believe that curing Alzheimer's once it starts will be even harder. So science has turned toward finding something people can do in their 50s — maybe even earlier — to protect their brains from this disease.

"We know so little about putting the damaged brain back together that keeping it together is by far the best," says Dr. Samuel Gandy, director of the neuroscience institute at Thomas Jefferson University.

Already, many doctors recommend vitamin E to older patients — in part because it seems harmless — but experts caution they really cannot say with certainty that any of these things will keep away Alzheimer's.

"We are making good progress, but realistically we cannot prevent the disease today," says Dr. Ronald Peterson, head of Alzheimer's research at the Mayo Clinic. The best advice for now? Clean living.

Yes, the same wisdom the medical world has offered for a generation to prevent all manner of ills unrelated to the brain.

"If we put this together into a kind of prescription, it's a healthy lifestyle, keeping active physically and mentally, and maybe taking some vitamins," says Dr. George Grossberg, head of geriatric psychiatry at St. Louis University.

Doctors feel on firm ground with these recommendations because they are already known to prevent heart disease. And one of their most enticing clues is the surprising parallel between the risks for heart attack and Alzheimer's disease.

Just about everything bad for the heart also appears to increase the risk of Alzheimer's. The list includes high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar, a high-fat diet, obesity and lack of exercise.

"There has been an explosion of information that links heart disease risk factors and Alzheimer's disease," says William Thies, the Alzheimer's Association's medical director. "The gun is not only smoking, it's still warm."

ON THE NET:
Alzheimer's Association:
<http://www.alz.org/>
Medical Editor Daniel G. Haney is a special correspondent for The Associated Press.

Hospice provides holiday grief workshops

The loss of a loved one is emotionally painful for all persons involved, and often the holiday season seems to magnify that pain. Family members and loved ones struggle to understand their loss as they try to deal with a heavy emotional load while coping with the stress of the holidays.

Helping families cope with the holiday season is the objective of the Angela Hospice Bereavement Department, which is sponsoring holiday grief workshops for both adults and children. Ruth Favor, bereavement coordinator, says the workshops have been well attended every year, as the workshops provide participants

with ideas and suggestions to help them get through the holiday season.

"Holidays are a difficult time of year to cope when someone is grieving, especially if it is close to the time of losing a loved one or the anniversary of a loved one's death," said Favor.

"People coping with loss sometimes need to make changes to their holiday schedule, to inform others of their needs and allow themselves some breathing space. Accepting your limitations and learning to 'play it by ear' regarding your schedule will help accommodate a grieving person's current needs, as well as asking for and accepting

help to lessen the holiday burden."

This year, in addition to adult grief workshops, a children's holiday workshop is being offered. Certified grief professionals and trained bereavement volunteers will facilitate the sessions, and parents are welcome to share the program with their child. Children 6-17 years of age will be placed in age-appropriate groups, and as part of the session participants will design and make a holiday wreath in honor of their loved one.

"Angela Hospice will supply the wreaths and some materials for the children," said Favor, adding that suggestions will be offered at the time of registration regarding items children can bring from home to decorate their wreath."

The children's holiday workshop takes place 5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 3, and the adult holiday workshops take place 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 27, 1-3 p.m. Monday, Dec. 9, and 7-9 p.m. Monday, Dec. 9.

All grief workshops are free of charge and open to the community. They will be held at the Angela Hospice Care Center located on Newburgh Road, just north of Schoecraft Road in Livonia. For more information or to register, contact the Bereavement Department at Angela Hospice, (734) 464-7810 or (734) 953-6012.

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