“Vitamin E May Boost Survival in People with Alzheimer’s Disease”

If you knew that taking vitamins would increase your lifespan would you take them? That is usually the idea behind taking them, to stay happy and healthy. Recent findings were presented at the American Academy of Neurology 60th Anniversary Annual Meeting in Chicago showing that Alzheimer’s patients that take vitamin E appear to live longer than those who don’t take the vitamin at all, the discovery has been found but more research is needed to confirm these interesting findings.

Researchers followed 847 people with Alzheimer’s disease for five years, on average. It was estimated that around two-thirds of the group took 1,000 international units of vitamin E twice daily, along with the Alzheimer’s drug Aricept. This common Alzheimer’s drug is known as a “cholinesterase inhibitor,” which in normal terms is known as a drug class that may temporarily slow, but not reverse the progression of Alzheimer’s. For the testing around 15 percent did not take the vitamin E and less than 10 percent of the group did. In conclusion, “The study found people who took vitamin E, with or without an Alzheimer’s drug, were 26 percent less likely to die than people who didn't take vitamin E.”

While many people don’t have the mind altering disease known as Alzheimer’s it is good to take vitamin E to help protect the brain from damage, even though there is no discovery set in stone that states the vitamin is proven to benefit for brain health. “Vitamin E is a potent antioxidant, a substance that neutralizes highly reactive oxygen molecules (or free radicals) throughout the body, including the brain.” Unfortunately, there is still no known cause of Alzheimer’s disease, but studies have shown that an excess of free radicals may damage brain cells. Antioxidants such as vitamin E, C, and others have been researched by scientists to see if they have any type of benefits for Alzheimer’s patients or help prevent the continuous downfall of the disease.

Study author Valory Pavlik, Ph.D., with Baylor College of Medicine’s Alzheimer’s Disease and Memory Disorders Center in Houston states, “Now, we've been able to show that vitamin E appears to increase the survival time of Alzheimer's patients as well. This is particularly important, because recent studies in heart disease patients have questioned whether vitamin E is beneficial for survival.” Researchers several years ago at Johns Hopkins found that if patients take vitamin E at doses over 200 I.U. a day, they can be at an increased risk of having a heart attack. In other words, the greater dosage of vitamin E puts them at a greater risk of death from a heart attack. Although the current study oddly found an opposing effect: vitamin E can actually boost survival in people with Alzheimer’s disease. Vitamin E taken along with an Alzheimer’s drug is more beneficial than taking either one alone. Dr. Pavlik stated, “Our findings show that people who took a cholinesterase inhibitor without vitamin E did not have a survival benefit.”

More Research Needed

Although this breakthrough has been discovered, there is still more research that needs to be done to determine whether vitamin E is safe and effective for survival in Alzheimer’s patients or at risk for the disease. A study took place in 2002 suggesting that eating foods or vitamin supplements that included vitamin E may help protect against mental decline. Another study showed that a combination of antioxidants, including vitamin E and C and coenzyme Q10, may offer benefit. There are still ongoing studies of vitamin E and its compatibility to help prevent or treat Alzheimer’s. “One, the PREADVISE, for “Prevention of Alzheimer’s Disease by Vitamin
E and Selenium,” trial is attempting to determine if the antioxidant effects of vitamin E and selenium can help to prevent memory loss and dementia in older adults. Another study, sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, is asking whether the combination of vitamin E and Namenda (memantine) slows progression of mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease.”

So, as of right now, consult your doctor and see what he has to say about the intake. “Vitamin E is a fat-soluble vitamin, meaning that it is stored in the body, and might potentially build up to toxic levels or affect the body’s breakdown of other medications people may be taking.” Vitamin E may also increase the thinning of your blood so you should take special precautions when taking that along with blood thinners or aspirin.