HEALTH AWARENESS

Antioxidant Vitamins And Alzheimer's Disease

(NAPSA)—Health professionals and public health organizations have been taking note of the impact that the aging baby boomer population is having on the incidence of chronic disease. One illness of particular concern is Alzheimer's disease (AD), the devastating neurological condition that causes dementia and affects other mental functions.

With 4.5 million people currently affected by the disease and nearly 14 million expected to have the disease by 2050, scientific researchers are looking for ways to prevent its occurrence. Scientists have found some promise from antioxidant vitamins, particularly vitamins E and C. Antioxidant vitamins help prevent the cell damage caused by the formation of substances known as free radicals. Free radicals are created through normal bodily functions but can be damaging to certain cells, particularly nerve cells, and may contribute to the development of AD.

One recent study by Johns Hopkins University looked at the prevalence of AD among elderly residents and the development of the disease over a three-year period. The researchers found that the initial prevalence of the disease was 78 percent lower among those who took a combination of vitamin E and vitamin C supplements. The risk for its later development was 64 percent lower among those taking the two supplements and 53 percent lower among those taking vitamin E and a multivitamin containing vitamin C.

Although the authors of this study did not report on the participants' precise intake of these vitamins, they did note that vitamin E supplements contain doses of up to 1000 IU and vitamin C supplements generally contain doses between 500 and 1000 mg.

Among the elderly population, vitamins C and E may help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's.

Previous epidemiological studies have suggested that vitamin E intake is associated with less cognitive decline and a lower incidence of AD among aging populations. The Chicago Health and Aging Project (CHAP) found a 36 percent reduction in the rate of decline among persons with the highest level of vitamin E intake, compared to those with the lowest level of intake. In another analysis of the CHAP population, researchers found that those with the highest intake levels of vitamin E from foods had a 67 percent reduction in risk for AD.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than seven out of 10 people with Alzheimer's disease live at home, where almost 75 percent of their care is provided by family and friends. In addition, national direct and indirect annual costs of caring for individuals with Alzheimer's disease are at least $100 billion.