

Foods You Love May Protect Your Brain

(NAPSA)—Researchers at the recent Alzheimer's Association International Conference on Prevention of Dementia had some good news for an aging population: Eating delicious foods such as strawberries and other berries is a positive step towards protecting your brain against future Alzheimer's disease. These foods are rich sources of folate, an important B vitamin, as well as vitamin C and other antioxidants that have been associated with prevention of cognitive decline.

Alzheimer's disease currently afflicts nearly 28 million people worldwide at a cost of around \$156 billion. At least four and a half million Americans are afflicted and this number is projected to climb as high as 16 million by the year 2050 as the elderly population grows.

The death of America's former President, Ronald Reagan, from Alzheimer's disease last year brought this once "closeted" condition onto center stage. Research has stepped up on ways to delay its progression, delay its onset or, better yet, prevent it altogether. So far, the best strategies for preserving brain health appear to be the very same ones that also may protect against other chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer: healthier diets, more exercise.

In the healthy diet category, several presentations at the conference were of note. In one, older people who drank fruit and vegetable juices more than three times a week had a 75 percent reduced chance of developing Alzheimer's disease, compared to people who did so less than once a week. Another study assessed cognitive function in older people over a seven-year period and found that those with the highest fruit and vegetable intakes had the least cognitive decline.

Fruits and vegetables are high in antioxidant vitamins, phytonutrients, the B vitamin folate and other healthy components. One



Scientists say strawberries and other fruits can be "berry" good for your mental health.

study reported that taking 800 mcg of folic acid for three years slowed cognitive decline and preserved memory in people aged 50 to 70 years. Those who took the supplement had the memory capabilities of people five and a half years younger and cognitive speed of people nearly two years younger.

An analysis of older U.S. women in the Nurses' Health Study also found that those with the highest plasma folate and vitamin B12 levels were cognitively equivalent to being about five years younger.

Strawberries, for example, are a particularly good source of folate, so getting these super foods into the diet as much as possible makes sense. Some people find it easier to achieve high levels of fruit intake by incorporating fruits into smoothies and other convenient drinkable forms.

Although much remains to be learned, the scientists think that fruit and vegetable nutrients benefit the brain by reducing inflammation, reducing oxidant damage, reducing homocysteine, improving brain cell membrane repair and function, improving blood flow and improving insulin sensitivity. All of these processes may be involved in development of Alzheimer's disease.