

[IMAGE]

Low Levels of Vitamin B₁₂, Folic Acid Increase Risk of Alzheimer's

Vitamin B₁₂ deficiencies have been discovered in people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and low levels of folic acid are linked to intellectual deterioration. B₁₂ and folic acid aid in cell formation and prevent nerve damage. Is there a direct association between B₁₂/folic acid levels and Alzheimer's?

A study appearing in the May issue of *Neurology* sought to determine whether low B₁₂ and folic acid (or folate) levels are risk factors for Alzheimer's and dementia. Three hundred and seventy subjects (75 years or older) were observed for three years to record the number of cases of Alzheimer's that developed. Researchers analyzed data on subjects with high and low levels of both B₁₂ and folate, as well as subjects with normal levels of one vitamin but not the other, to explore the combined effects of the two vitamins.

Subjects with low levels of B₁₂, folate or both had twice the risk of developing Alzheimer's, compared to those with normal vitamin levels. This was even more likely in subjects with good initial cognition. The authors of the study speculate that vitamin deficiency may have an increased effect in the earliest phases of Alzheimer's.

Tips to help prevent the onset of Alzheimer's:

- Eat plenty of raw spinach, peas, beans, brown rice and other vegetables that are rich in folic acid;
- Remember that folic acid is destroyed when cooked, so eat these vegetables raw; and
- Eat foods rich in B₁₂, such as beef, fish, milk and eggs. If you are a vegetarian, you will have more difficulty getting enough B₁₂, which is found almost exclusively in animal tissues, but can obtain it from brewer's yeast or supplements.

Reference: Wang HX, Wahlin A, Basun H, et al. Vitamin B₁₂ and folate in relation to the development of Alzheimer's disease. *Neurology* May 2001;56, pp 1188-1194.

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