Is There a Link Between Migraines and Dementia?

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Migraine and Dementia

A great deal of research is looking into illnesses that affect the brain. While much is still unknown, progress is being made. Scientists are looking to see if relationships exist among these conditions that affect the brain, as well as what increases and decreases the chances of illnesses occurring.

If you have migraines, you may wonder if the terrible pain you suffer from predisposes you to other illness that may affect your brain, like dementia.

A few years ago people became concerned when it was discovered that people who had migraine headaches accompanied by auras sometimes developed patches of white matter within their brains. It turned out that in the vast majority of cases, the lesions were completely harmless. Current research shows that people who have migraine headaches, regardless of whether or not they experience auras, are no more likely than anyone else to develop Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia.

However, the researchers did determine that migraines do increase a sufferer's chances of having a stroke. They concluded that smokers who have migraines, especially headaches which are accompanied by auras, need to stop smoking in order to lower their stroke risks.

Researchers also evaluated the presence of headaches among people who were afflicted with dementia. They determined that people who had dementia were more likely to experience stress headaches more commonly than any other kind of headache. Stress headaches are the most frequently experienced type of headache among people who do not have dementia too.

Although having migraines doesn't make you more likely to develop a form of dementia, it's prudent to take steps to protect yourself nonetheless. Consider the following.

Vitamin D

A research study was conducted to see if a link exists between vitamin D and the development of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. The researchers discovered that individuals who had low levels of vitamin D their bloodstreams were more likely to develop dementia than people who had normal levels of vitamin D.

Occurrences of Alzheimer's disease and other kinds of dementia, including vascular dementia, were elevated among individuals with low levels of vitamin D. The researchers did not determine if vitamin D supplementation reduced the likelihood of dementia, stating that further research was needed before recommendations regarding vitamin D supplementation for the prevention of cognitive impairments could be made.

Next page: eating right and future research.

Vitamin D

An earlier study also indicated that a deficiency of vitamin D was related to Alzheimer's disease and other kinds of dementia. The researchers who conducted that study found that in addition to dementia, a lack of vitamin D was a related to elevated risks of stroke and blood vessel disease. These researchers proposed that vitamin D protects the blood vessels within the brain.

Another group of researchers investigated possible ways that vitamin D protects the brain. They suggested that vitamin D may work at a genetic level. The researchers also stated that vitamin D may reduce inflammation and support the transmission of messages within the brain. While the scientists recognized that more research was needed, they suggested that the best type of vitamin D for supplementation is calcitriol, the active form of Vitamin D3.

Eating Right

A small study evaluated the relationship between diet and the development of Alzheimer's disease. The scientists found that people who ate diets rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes and fish, and low in fat, meat, sugar, and high fat dairy products experienced lower levels of plaque formation within their brains when compared with people who other types of diets. Plaque formation is a sign of Alzheimer's disease. The authors reviewed other studies that consistently showed the same results. They indicated that folic acid, vitamin B12, beta carotene and vitamin D may be important in the prevention of Alzheimer's disease.

Future Research into Conditions That Affect the Brain

While much has been discovered about migraines and dementia, there is a vast quantity of research that still needs to be done. As more is learned about each condition, additional doorways open up to having more knowledge about the complex workings of the brain.

It is important to be aware of current information, as the knowledge base is growing rapidly. I urge caution as well. Sometimes studies are misreported or conducted by researchers who are more interested in profits than in pure science. Keep in mind that we know more now than we did 10 years ago; and that with each passing day we know more than we did the day before. That can give us hope for preventing, treating, and living with these complex conditions.