

Report claims success treating Alzheimer's memory loss

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But experts won't embrace this 36-point program of lifestyle changes and supplements without more research.

(HealthDay)— A researcher is reporting success in a small study of reversing memory problems associated with early stage Alzheimer's disease by using a complex program of lifestyle changes, supplements and hormones.

Of the first 10 patients treated, nine reported improvements in memory within three to six months, according to Dr. Dale Bredeisen, a professor of neurology at the University of California, Los Angeles, who developed the program.

The full regimen involves 36 components, and is tailored to the individual, Bredeisen said. In general, it involves diet changes such as

eliminating simple carbohydrates and processed foods; regular exercise; stress reduction; good sleep habits; [supplements](#) like [fish oil](#), curcumin and vitamin D; and, in some cases, hormone therapy.

Writing in the September issue of the journal *Aging*, Bredesen describes the cases of 10 patients undergoing the therapy—half of whom were diagnosed with mild mental (cognitive) impairment or early-stage Alzheimer's.

The others had more-advanced Alzheimer's or "subjective" cognitive impairment—where people have normal scores on tests of memory and thinking, but complain of problems in daily life.

The single patient who did not respond to the therapy had advanced Alzheimer's, Bredesen said. Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia, is a progressive brain disease without a cure.

"Obviously, larger studies are warranted," Bredesen stressed. He said patients' daily lives had been altered. Several who'd had to quit their jobs were back at work, he noted.

Other experts called the findings "interesting," but urged caution.

"It's way too early to draw any conclusions from this," said Heather Snyder, director of medical and scientific operations for the Alzheimer's Association in Chicago. "It raises a lot of questions that should be explored in larger studies."

Dr. James Galvin, a professor of neurology at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City, echoed that sentiment.

"I'm not knocking the concept," Galvin said. The factors the program targets—including diet, physical activity and chronic body-wide

inflammation—are scientifically valid, he said.

But, Galvin added, it's hard to evaluate the specific therapies, particularly the supplements, based only on these case reports.

"There's not enough here to understand why these things were chosen, or how the doses were chosen," Galvin said.

The supplements included curcumin, vitamins B12 and D3, fish oil, coconut oil, resveratrol, coenzyme Q10 and ashwagandha—an herb used in traditional Indian medicine.

Some of those therapies have been shown individually to have no benefit against mental decline, Galvin noted.

But Bredesen said it's the combined effects of the therapies that's key.

The program, Bredesen said, is based on years of lab research into what goes wrong in the brain as people progress from mild [memory problems](#) to full-blown dementia.

Bredesen said he theorizes that Alzheimer's stems from an "imbalance" in the brain's signaling system.

In a healthy brain, the theory goes, certain signals support nerve connections and the formation of memories, while other signals help shed irrelevant information. But when people are in cognitive decline, that balance goes awry

From that basis, Bredesen and his lab developed the 36-point program.

It's not one-size-fits-all, Bredesen stressed. "Each person has a different chemistry," he said. "And we measure dozens of parameters in each

patient."

The 10 patients in this report have been followed for anywhere from 3 months to 2.5 years. The woman followed the longest—diagnosed with mild impairment and now 70—is "still going strong," Bredesen said.

Some components of her program included: Eliminating gluten and processed foods, and eating more fruits, vegetables and non-farmed fish to address inflammation and insulin levels; yoga and meditation to reduce stress; melatonin to help stretch her sleep time to 7 or 8 hours each night; fish oil; vitamins D3 and B12; and hormone replacement therapy.

Bredesen acknowledged there are obstacles to moving this approach into larger studies.

In traditional clinical trials, researchers test only one treatment at a time—not 36. And they often compare that single therapy to a placebo.

"Many people feel better just because you're doing something for them," Galvin said.

It won't be possible to put this program to that type of test. But Galvin said future studies could rigorously assess patients before and after they go through the program, to confirm that the benefits are real and lasting.

So what can people do right now? Galvin said it's always wise to eat a healthy diet, exercise, engage your mind and get adequate sleep.

As for supplements, he cautioned that besides lack of evidence that they work individually, "these things aren't cheap."

If an older adult were to take the supplements used in this program,

Galvin noted, that could easily cost a couple of hundred dollars a month.

Also, experts usually advise against taking supplements without checking with a doctor.

More information: The Alzheimer's Association has more on [lifestyle and brain health](#).

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