

Anti-inflammatory diet could lower your odds for dementia

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Eating a healthy diet that dampens inflammation in the body could lower your odds for dementia, especially if you already have heart risk factors, a new Swedish study shows.

So-called anti-inflammatory diets focus on foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fish and beans and include heart-healthy regimens such as the [Mediterranean diet](#).

In a study involving more than 84,000 older adults tracked for more than 12 years, those who adhered to an anti-inflammatory diet had a 21% lower odds of developing dementia, compared to people who ate an unhealthy pro-inflammatory diet rich in red meats, eggs, dairy and processed foods.

When looking specifically at [older adults](#) with ailments such as [heart disease](#) or diabetes, the risk of dementia fell by 31% when they stuck to an anti-inflammatory diet, reported a team led by Abigail Dove. She's an investigator at the Aging Research Center at the Karolinska Institute, in Stockholm.

MRI brain scans of a subset of more than 9,000 of the participants also showed neurological benefits linked to the healthier diet.

There were "positive changes within the brain," noted Dr. Liron Sinvani, director of geriatric hospital services for North Shore University Hospital, in Manhasset, N.Y.

"Larger [gray matter volume](#)—gray matter is good—and lower burden of 'white matter hyperintensities' was seen among those who ate an anti-inflammatory diet," said Sinvani, who wasn't involved in the new research.

She explained that a high level of [white matter hyperintensities](#) in the brain is a harbinger of dementia, so the fact that there was less of it in the brains of folks who ate anti-inflammatory regimens was a good sign.

"So really, it's showing not only less clinically diagnosed dementia, but

also [healthy] changes in the brain that we see on imaging," she noted.

The findings were published Aug. 12 in the journal [JAMA Network Open](#).

Dove's team looked at data in the UK Biobank, which has tracked the health of British adults for years. The new study involved more than 84,000 people under the age of 60 who were free of dementia when they entered the database between 2006 and 2010.

Over an average of 12.4 years, 1,559 (1.9%) of the participants developed dementia.

Data on each person's dietary intake was also recorded, and it revealed a significant lowering of the risk for dementia among those who most closely adhered to the anti-inflammatory diet.

Brain changes that signaled a heightened odds for dementia were also more likely in the MRI scans of people who ate a pro-inflammatory diet, the researchers said.

"A potential explanation for our results is that an anti-inflammatory diet might dampen systemic inflammation [especially among people with cardiovascular or metabolic diseases], thereby slowing the development of [dementia](#)," Dove's team wrote.

"I think this study once again really emphasizes the importance of a healthy diet" for [brain](#) health, Sinvani said.

However, if your life feels too harried to get enough fruits and vegetables and whole grains, can [anti-inflammatory](#) supplements fill the gap?

Maybe not, Sinvani said.

"There are a lot of antioxidant supplements and I would warn against that and say that there are studies that haven't really supported going the supplement route," she said. "It really has to come from the diet."

More information: Dove A, et al. Anti-Inflammatory Diet and Dementia in Older Adults With Cardiometabolic Diseases. *JAMA Network Open*. (2024) [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.27125](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.27125)

Find out more about the Mediterranean diet at the [American Heart Association](#).

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