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**“PRUDENT” DIET MAY REDUCE COGNITIVE DECLINE AND
IMPACT OF UNHEALTHY DIET AS PEOPLE AGE**

*Study Published in Alzheimer's Association Journal Adds to Body of Evidence that
Key Lifestyle Changes Can Impact Memory and Thinking Abilities*

CHICAGO, October 12, 2015 – Eating healthier may reduce cognitive decline and diminish the negative impact of an unhealthy diet on memory and thinking abilities in older adults, suggests a new study published online by *Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association*.

“Most people eat a combination of healthy and less healthy foods, but we know little about how a mix of dietary patterns may impact cognitive function,” says study author Behnaz Shakersain, M.S., a Ph.D. candidate at the Aging Research Center within the Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society at the Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden. “In our study population, we saw evidence that those who mostly consumed an unhealthy diet had approximately twice as much cognitive decline than those who consumed healthy and unhealthy diets together over time.”

The study analyzed the diets of 2,223 Swedish adults aged 60 or older and compared this information with their cognitive function over a six-year period. All individuals were dementia-free at the start of the study and underwent cognitive testing at the start and again after three years and six years. Cognitive abilities were measured using the Mini-Mental State Examination, which is frequently used in research settings and by health care professionals to screen for dementia and is scored from 0 to 30. A questionnaire given at the beginning of the study asked participants how often nearly 100 different food and beverage items were consumed over the previous 12 months. The researchers used the responses to group participants by how strongly they adhered to a “Western” pattern diet and a “prudent” pattern diet, as defined by the researchers.

- The “Western” diet was characterized by more frequent consumption of red/processed meat, saturated/trans-fat, refined grains, sugar, beer, and spirits.
- The “prudent” diet included more frequent consumption of vegetables, fruits, cooking/dressing oil, cereals and legumes, whole grains, rice/pasta, fish, low-fat dairy, poultry, and water.

People in the study with the highest adherence to the “prudent” diet and the least adherence to the “Western” diet, labeled as the “high protection, low risk group,” experienced the smallest decline in cognitive function over time. Individuals in the study with the least adherence to the “prudent” diet and the highest adherence to the “Western” diet, labeled as the “low protection, high risk group,” showed a statistically significant increase in cognitive decline with an average of more than 1 point decline in general cognitive test score over time compared to those in the “high protection, low risk group.”

Interestingly, the researchers also found that people in the study who had a high adherence to both the “prudent” and “Western” dietary patterns, labeled as “the high protection, high risk group,” had only about half (53.5%) the decline in cognition on average than those in the “low protection, high risk group,” which was also statistically significant. The study authors suggest that more frequent intake of the “prudent” diet may reduce the cognitive decline associated with more frequent intake of the “Western” diet.

The study participants were chosen from the Swedish National study on Aging and Care-Kungsholmen (SNAC-K). SNAC-K observes individuals aged 60 or older who live either at home or in institutions in the Kungsholmen district in Stockholm with a focus on the aging process and the Swedish care system.

“This study adds to a growing body of research that demonstrates lifestyle factors, such as diet, play an important role in reducing risk for cognitive decline and possibly dementia,” says Heather Snyder, Ph.D., Alzheimer’s Association Director of Medical & Scientific Operations. “Additional research is needed on more diverse groups of people for more specific recommendations to emerge, especially regarding dementia, but this study is further evidence that diet may impact the rate of cognitive decline. Since currently there are no treatments that can prevent, stop or slow the progression of Alzheimer’s disease, lifestyle interventions is an important and ongoing area of research support for the Alzheimer’s Association.”

“Prudent diet may attenuate the adverse effects of Western diet on cognitive decline” is freely available on the *Alzheimer’s & Dementia* website at www.alzheimersanddementia.com.

Given the growing evidence that people can reduce their risk of cognitive decline, the Alzheimer’s Association recently shared 10 Ways to Love Your Brain, which is comprised of tips that may help lessen the chance of cognitive decline as we age. The suggestions include engaging in regular cardiovascular exercise that elevates your heart rate, getting more formal education, quitting smoking and eating a Mediterranean diet. The complete list can be found at alz.org.

While not a funder of this study, the Alzheimer’s Association has awarded more than \$8.3 million to 43 studies during the past 7 years to better understand risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia, including the potential impact of diet, exercise, and mental engagement. The Alzheimer’s Association is the largest nonprofit funder of Alzheimer’s disease research.

About *Alzheimer’s & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer’s Association*

The mission of *Alzheimer’s & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer’s Association* (www.alzheimersanddementia.com) is to bridge the knowledge gaps across a wide range of bench-to-bedside investigations. The journal creates a forum for rapid communication of new findings, ideas and perspectives; increases knowledge in diverse disciplines to promote early detection/diagnosis and/or interventions; and provides the scientific impetus for new initiatives or public policies concerning research on prevention and new models of health services. The *Alzheimer’s & Dementia* umbrella includes the companion open-access journals: *Alzheimer’s & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring* (www.dadm.alzdem.com) and *Alzheimer’s & Dementia: Translational Research & Clinical Interventions* (www.trci.alzdem.com).

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