

Real Foods that Heal
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Sun dried tomatoes: a possible role for magnesium in preventing Alzheimer's

We continue this week our focus on foods that have the potential to reduce risk of Alzheimer's dementia. Recalling the foundation of this discussion, that we are viewing Alzheimer's (like other degenerative brain diseases) as an inflammatory condition, let's examine another food that is "first in its class" for the content of a nutrient that may be preventive: sun-dried tomatoes, chosen for this discussion because of their magnesium content.

I need to be clear: I am not aware of any studies which have concluded that eating either magnesium supplements or tomatoes (sun-dried or otherwise) prevents Alzheimer's Disease (AD). But going back a couple of decades, there is a string of research articles showing a correlation between lower levels of magnesium and AD (most recently a 2005 article from pathologists in Hungary and Germany who documented lower brain magnesium levels in AD patients compared to controls). How this is correlated or whether it is causal is not clear. But I'd like to set forth a theory of my own, and try to connect the dots in this short bulletin. Here are the dots. Dot 1: A 2002 paper published by researchers at George Washington University showed that rats whose diets were deficient in magnesium did not tolerate a heart muscle injury as well as magnesium rich rats. The magnesium deficient rats had much higher levels of inflammatory chemicals in response to an ischemic (cut off of oxygen) injury, and as a result lost a larger amount of tissue permanently. In a nutshell, the rat hearts which were low in magnesium had a worse inflammatory response to loss of oxygen and did not recover as well, losing greater amounts of tissue. Dot 2: heart disease and AD tend to cluster together and share the same risk factors, "what's good for the heart is good for the brain." Dot 3: AD is an inflammatory condition of the brain. My hypothesis then is that higher levels of magnesium could protect the brain from inflammation, especially if repeated small vascular blocks (mini-strokes) were compounding the problem. An additional interesting side note: magnesium has been looked at as an essential co-factor in the way neurons (brain cells) communicate with each other, and some believe it is useful in stabilizing attention and mood.

So back to the sun-dried tomato. Per ounce of food, this flavor-intense and elegant vegetable packs more magnesium than just about any other vegetable on the American table. Just one ounce contains over 50 mg (14% of your recommended daily amount). It is also an excellent source of potassium, iron, and B-vitamins. And remember, this bulletin is about foods, not supplements. The best science we have showing that nutrition decreases chronic disease of any kind has looked at foods people eat, not at pills they take. So add sun-dried

tomatoes to a good mix of healthy foods, knowing you can enjoy it even if you ignore the healthy magnesium content!

Pasta with sun-dried tomatoes

Cook a pot of your favorite pasta, al dente (a little chewy, it has a lower glycemic index that way). While it is preparing, sauté in olive oil chopped green peppers, onions and some fresh mushrooms. When the pasta is drained, toss it with the cooked vegetables, a cup of sun-dried tomatoes packed in olive oil, and some chopped fresh basil. Sprinkle over the top with a little grated fresh parmesan cheese, and fresh ground pepper to taste. Then take your time and enjoy this meal with someone you love. It's worth slowing down for.

And remember, someone you know needs this information so that they can also benefit from the healing powers of foods. Please forward this bulletin to them by using the link below.

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, M.D.

www.realfoodsthatheal.com

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