



the tree of life

BY JOANNE PIZZINO, MD, MPH MEDICAL EDITOR

Doctor, How Can I Make My Brain Young Again?

Is quick, sharp thinking just a pill away as some supplement manufacturers may lead you to believe? The answer to this is very likely a resounding **“NO!”** The brain and nervous system are subject to the same wear and tear mechanisms that affect all the other organs in our bodies. In fact, the same lifestyle choices that maintain heart health also preserve our memories and thinking functions. Because you may already be familiar with much information about food, exercise, and stress management, let's take a look at three other specific factors that can rejuvenate or rehabilitate your noggin.

GUT-BRAIN CONNECTION

The gut—that tube that runs from your pie-hole to the other end—is directly controlled by one of the longest nerves in the body, called the vagus nerve. While it may be obvious that the brain controls digestion unconsciously, there are actually more fibers in the vagus nerve that run from the stomach and intestines upward to the brain than downward. As two-thirds of your immune system is located in the gut, the minute-to-minute interactions between your defenders and your allies is communicated up to the brain.

These allies are many different micro-organisms that live on us and in us, known as the microbiome. When invaders gain a foothold, creating inflammation, this inflammatory message spreads throughout your body, including that big computer in your head. Inflammation slows down the processing speed of the brain, and has been highly linked to dementia, depression, attention-deficit disorder, and many other mental function disorders. Symptoms associated with high risk for this inflammation include: chronic diarrhea or constipation, irritable bowel syndrome, and foul-smelling gas. Signs on physical examination include poor dental health, a coated tongue, and any other signs of inflammation such as swollen joints, rashes, or wheezing. As discussed below, a simple urine test can help us assess your state of brain inflammation. Correcting these issues using Functional Medicine (see <https://www.whole-health-solutions.com/how-we-are-different>) can lead to

noticeable improvement in brain fog, mood, and memory in just a few weeks.

HIDDEN BRAIN INFECTIONS

The latest research shows significant correlation between chronic infection with certain micro-organisms and diseases of brain aging, such as Alzheimer's dementia. These are common bacteria and viruses, such as E. Coli, the Borrelia bacteria that causes Lyme disease, and herpes zoster virus, which causes shingles. There is considerable evidence that these organisms can hide in the brain and nervous system long after their outward signs such as rashes and fevers are gone. Sophisticated laboratory testing is often needed to detect their ongoing presence. The good news is that advanced treatments are now available.

Toxins

Not only do we live in a world containing more elaborate chemicals than ever before, our own waste products must compete with these chemicals for biotransformation and elimination (commonly called detoxification.) Heavy metals such as mercury, arsenic, and lead are found throughout the environment. Volatile Organic Chemicals (VOCs) are petroleum-derived products, such as pesticides, plasticizers, and perfumes. Even the ubiquitous molds growing in our homes and workplaces secrete toxins that directly poison the brain. It is often necessary to work with a trained Functional Medicine physician to safely remove these contaminants. (See *Dos and Don'ts of Detoxification* at <https://www.whole-health-solutions.com/health-links>)

Previous *Health&Healing* issues and our website Health References called “Diagnostics for Dummies” tell more about the Organic Acids Test (OAT), an at-home urine test that can provide clues to these and many other factors that may be affecting your thinking and mood. We recommend this as part of your annual physical exam to detect and correct risk factors for brain aging while you can still remember your loved ones. **llh**

Joanne Pizzino, MD, MPH and Karen Saylor, FNP, specialize in Functional Medicine, including scientifically proven therapies to improve brain function, mood and fatigue. Learn how epigenetic testing, condition-specific nutrition, botanical medicine and detoxification can improve cognitive function. Or, as one patient put it: “That was like getting 100-point increase in my IQ!”

To take memory tests, learn about mild cognitive impairment, brain exercises and more, visit this link on our website: <http://www.whole-health-solutions.com/Health-Links.html>.

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