How to Reverse Alzheimer's Disease

In November 2014, California researcher Dale Bredesen reported on a therapeutic program he used to successfully reverse cognitive decline (see link at bottom of article). He reported on 10 patients who were enrolled in this program. Six of his 10 patients had discontinued work due to memory issues, but after following his program, they were able to return to work. All patients but one improved on objective measurements, as well as subjectively. Several months after the publication of this article, there are now about 45 patients and the results continue to be encouraging. A research study with 200 patients is being launched by MUSES Lab.

This therapeutic program is based on a multifaceted approach. It contains the following components:

- The patients’ diet was optimized by minimizing carbohydrates and inflammatory foods
- A 12 hour fast was instituted each night
- Stress was reduced using a personalized approach
- Sleep was optimized, including treating sleep apnea where needed
- Exercise was increased
- Brain stimulation was added in the form of software such as Posit
- Blood tests were used to optimize B and D vitamin sufficiency, and zinc to copper ratio
- Vitamin E, selenium, NAC, alpha-lipoic acid, coQ10 were added
Anti-inflammatory herbs were used for patients with high levels of inflammation.

- Thyroid hormone was balanced
- Gastrointestinal function was improved
- Herbs and other substances that improve cognition were recommended
- Building blocks for brain cell communication were provided (Citicoline, DHA, etc...)
- Heavy metals were tested and reduced where appropriate

This program is very exciting because there are no medications presently that are truly effective in preventing decline, let alone reversing it. It may seem strange that this hasn't made headlines: but what brand new medical therapy ever does?

First, there is Step 1: a small group of patients are convinced to try a new approach. If this works well, then, in Step 2, more patients are enrolled. Eventually, we get to Step 3: the drug company funds a large trial costing millions of dollars, researchers tally and publish the findings and gradually, the treatment is adopted by medical providers. The process normally takes about 15-20 years.

But here we are on Step 1. We have a group of patients who have met with resounding success. And the last step is in question: what deep pockets will fund this type of approach?

The treatment is time-consuming and demanding, but it does NOT pose a health risk. I see no reason not to consider it.

Most importantly, the program makes a lot of sense from a functional medicine perspective: we need to identify and correct all the underlying causes of inflammation, because inflammation disturbs mitochondria (energy transducers in your cells) and in turn that causes the brain to function very poorly. Then we need to use all the tools we have: we have research showing that exercise helps mitochondria a little bit; we know overnight fasting helps them a bit too; we know the supplements used in this program work a little bit; and we know a lot of people with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's or multiple sclerosis, or epilepsy, or depression and anxiety for that matter--benefit from the low-carb diet.

What Dr. Bredesen's approach does that is new is that it combines a large
number of these interventions. He explains it thus: "If you had a roof with 17 holes in it, would you want just a single one fixed? Would that be satisfactory? So we fix all 17 holes, that is why there are so many components to this program."

I am very excited to put this to the test. I am sticking very close to Dr. Bredesen’s successful recipe: first I do a functional medicine consultation, to uncover all the likely sources of inflammation and identify all the possible nutrient deficiencies. At baseline, we get brain function tests so we have a score to compare to in 3 months when we re-test.

Then, step by step, week by week, we add one or two components as tolerated. The visits can be brief, and follow up can be as frequent as you like. Within 3 months, with any luck at all, your life will be transformed.

If you wonder whether this is for you, you can use an online tool to see how your brain function compares to that of other people your age. You can take brain tests on Lumosity for example.

If you want to read the article for yourself, here’s a link:


Myrto Angela Ashe MD, MPH practices functional medicine in San Rafael, CA. She offers a 6-month health transformation program for adults who are motivated to maximize their health in order to live a long and fully enjoyable life. She also sees kids and anyone trying to avoid medication, get off medication, reverse chronic illness, or optimize well-being.

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