



THE BRITISH DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

The Professional Association for Registered Dietitians
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Media Release

12 August 2008

THINKING ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS TO HELP YOU THINK?

A new study carried out at the University of Aberdeen and published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, suggests that there is no conclusive evidence of a link between taking vitamin or mineral or fish oil supplements and reducing cognitive decline in older people.

Previous studies have indicated that with increasing age some people take longer to perform certain mental tasks such as remembering phone numbers or calculating change. At the more extreme end cognitive decline shows itself as dementia such as in the very disabling Alzheimer's disease. Scientists have for some time been trying to understand possible connections between the intakes of particular nutrients and effects on brain function with ageing.

While some observational studies have reported an association between poor nutrient status and greater cognitive decline, new analysis of 22 randomised trials involving nearly 3500 participants published in the *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* shows little evidence from these trials of the beneficial effects of vitamin/ mineral supplements.

Lead researcher Dr Shirley Jia, said: "Registered dietitians are aware of the great interest in the link between nutrient status and mental health in the elderly, and support many active measures to improve nutrition in people over the age of 65 years, especially those living in care homes or hospitals. However claims for the benefits of vitamin or mineral supplements on cognitive function need further support before specific recommendations can be made.

"Well designed large scale trials are needed to address this important issue, especially as cognitive decline may begin in early adulthood. In particular it may be worth investigating the particular effects of supplements on cognitive changes starting below the age of 70 or if high dose folic acid (a B group vitamin) can help short-term memory in people at an early stage of cognitive impairment."

The study was based on a comprehensive review of trials performed with participants over the age of 65 years. Only those involving random allocation to supplements or dummy tablets (placebo) and using standardised neuropsychological tests to measure cognitive changes were included. Analysis of

the combined results showed no significant effect of taking B vitamins or antioxidant vitamins. In addition the researchers concluded there were insufficient trials to evaluate the effect of fish oils on cognitive impairment.

Media enquiries to The British Dietetic Association should be directed to our media hotline on 0870 850 2517 or pr@bda.uk.com.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Jia, X., McNeill, G. & Avenell, A. (2008) Does taking vitamin, mineral and fatty acid supplements prevent cognitive decline? A systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *J. Hum. Nutr. Diet.* 21, 317-336. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-277X.2008.00887.x>.

2. Dr Xueli Jia (Shirley) is a former PhD student at the Institute of Applied Health Science at the University of Aberdeen, and is available for interview. Contact x.jia@abdn.ac.uk or tel: 01224 559 801.

3. The *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* is the official journal of the British Dietetic Association. <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/jhn>.

4. The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with nearly 6,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance.

5. Registered dietitians hold the only legally-recognisable graduate qualification in nutrition and dietetics. They are experts in interpreting and translating the science of nutrition into practical ways of promoting nutritional well-being, disease treatment and the prevention of nutrition-related problems. Their advice is sound and based on current scientific evidence. Registration, awarded by the Health Professionals Council, is an indication that a dietitian is fit to practise and is working within an agreed statement of conduct. For further details about the British Dietetic Association, please visit our website: www.bda.uk.com.