What can I expect from this factsheet?

This factsheet guides you through evidence-based dietary prescriptions that help you guide your patients to lower their risk of Alzheimer’s disease. Learn how to empower them to focus on foods that can help prevent or manage the worsening of their condition.

Why it’s worth empowering your patient to change their dietary habits

- **Predominantly plant-based dietary patterns**, like the MIND diet, can reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease by up to 53%. Even moderate adherence to the MIND diet can lower the risk by 35% (21).
- **Dark leafy greens** are packed with neuroprotective vitamin E, lutein and beta-carotene. Regular consumption, ≥ 1 serving/day, can slow cognitive decline and keep your patient’s brain 11 years younger (23).
- High amounts of saturated fats can speed up cognitive decline in the elderly by 70%. In contrast, high amounts of unsaturated fatty acids keep your patient’s brain 6 years younger (34).

Start the conversation

- **Tone**: encouraging and friendly
- **Aim**: shared decision-making
- **Exemplary questions** below

“**What do you normally have for breakfast, lunch and dinner?”**
Meet your patients where they are. Once you have an idea about their usual foods, you can suggest small tweaks to help them eat more healthily.

“**How do you think you will benefit from better nutrition?”**
Ask about your patient’s WHY behind the desire for change. What symptoms do they hope to relieve? What do they hope to experience from a brain-healthy diet? Knowing their motivations can help you work together to set achievable goals.

“**What are the easiest eating habits for you to work on?”**
Identify which foods are the easiest for your patient to swap, which eating cues are easy to remove. Explore what they gain from these changes. Offer simple preparatory nudges, such as:
- Keep unhealthy foods out of sight
- Use smaller plates and bowls. This visual trick helps to control portions and improves mindful eating
- Plan and pre-portion healthy snacks and keep them within easy reach
Prescribe a predominantly whole food, plant-based diet

- Fill in the personalised Nutrition Prescription with ONE key brain-healthy food change - every small habit change has an impact
- Schedule a timely follow-up appointment and adapt the prescription, if necessary
- Provide your patient with printouts of the prescription, the handy Patient Card to attach to their fridge, and the Alzheimer’s Disease Patient Factsheet, if desired

Support behaviour change

Changing behaviour is a skill that can be trained. Try these conversation quick starters during a follow-up visit to empower your patients with individual solutions.

“What might help you eat healthier?”
Identify specific factors and tools that might support your patient to eat healthier. Based on what they report, offer options like preparing veggies or grains in batches so that they are easy to eat with each meal.

“Who can help you, and how?”
Encourage your patient to identify work colleagues, friends or partners who may be interested in joining and supporting your patient’s health goals. Suggest an online forum where Alzheimer’s patients share recipes and strategies to make more healthy choices.

Focus on what to add
Share the benefits of unprocessed plants with your patient. Encourage them to:

- Eat entirely or mostly a wide variety of whole plant foods (21)
- Emphasise vegetables, whole grains, legumes, fruit, nuts and seeds (22)
- Use herbs and spices instead of oil and salt to add delicious flavours (35)
- Add leafy greens, beans and nuts (36)
- Add omega-3 fats from walnuts, chia seeds and flax seeds (37)

Focus on swaps vs. avoidance
Encourage your patient to swap any of the following foods to:

- Avoid ultra-processed foods and beverages. These products often contain refined carbohydrates, added sugar, fat, salt and food additives (38)
- Avoid animal products such as meat, poultry, and dairy (39)
- Avoid processed meat including sausages, bacon, ham, salami, dried meat, canned meat, and sliced lunch meats (40)
- Avoid too much alcohol. Alcohol is a toxin in the human brain (41)
How will you know that dietary changes are working?

To be able to measure whether the prescribed dietary changes are effective, you need to:

- **PLAN** - State a clear numerical goal. Try to be as specific, clear and simple as possible. Engage your patients in defining the aim: “What and how much do you want to improve?”

- **DO** - Choose a testable outcome measure. Pick 1 or 2 reliable and doable measures to test and track changes over time. Depending on your location, you will find the best measures on your national Alzheimer’s association’s website.

- **STUDY** - Study the results and refine the dietary recommendations based on what you’ve learned from the test. Not all changes are improvements, but improvements always require changes.

- **ACT** - Learn from the experience and either adopt, adapt or discard accordingly. Return to the plan stage for the next dietary change.

**The PDSA cycle**

PDSA, or Plan-Do-Study-Act, is a flow diagram for learning or improving a process or product. You plan what you want to improve, try it out, see how it goes, and then make adjustments based on what you learn.

Learn more at deming.org

**Where can I learn more?**

- Read our blog on [Alzheimer’s Disease](#), where you can also find the list of references.
- Head to the [PAN Academy](#) for more information.