

2 Supplements Linked to Alzheimer's

And one that might protect your brain from degenerative diseases

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The brains of people with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and similar neurodegenerative diseases are often found to contain high levels of iron and copper, and new research suggests a possible explanation.

According to scientists at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, copper and iron cause cells to generate reactive oxygen molecules [@](#), which damage brain DNA, and also inhibit the brain's natural DNA repair mechanisms. Of course, our bodies need some amount of iron and copper to function, but it appears that having too much of these minerals circulating in the blood can be a problem.

These aren't the first researchers to raise alarms about copper and iron. Last year an article in the journal *Chemical Research in Toxicology* suggested that [people over 50 take steps to limit their exposure to copper and iron @](#). The author of the article, Dr. George J. Brewer, a University of Michigan Medical School researcher, said at the time:

"Both copper and iron toxicity are likely contributing to Alzheimer's disease. There is a major epidemic of Alzheimer's disease in the industrialized world (but) . . . it is still rare in India and Africa. There is something about industrialization that has brought this disease on in the developed world in epidemic proportions . . . I think it may be due, in part, to increased meat ingestion because of the increased bioavailability of copper and iron from meat, but may also be due in part to the increased use of copper pipes for plumbing in developed countries, and the increased ingestion of copper supplements."

5 Ways to Protect Yourself

Dr. Brewer laid out some simple steps that mid-lifers can take to lower the risks of excess iron and copper (though he emphasized that these are not medical recommendations, and that you should consult your doctor):

1. Throw away supplements containing iron and copper
2. Lower your meat intake
3. Avoid drinking water with elevated levels of copper
4. Take zinc supplements to lower copper levels
5. Donate blood periodically to lower iron levels

The Supplement We *Should* Take

Another thing that might protect your brain from the possibly damaging effects of copper and iron: Curcumin, the main ingredient in the bright yellow spice turmeric. The University of Texas researchers found that when they exposed copper and iron to curcumin in the lab the spice bonded with the metals in a way that stopped them from interfering with DNA repair.

Unless you eat curries every night, it might be a good idea to take a curcumin supplement. When I interviewed Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum on the subject late last year, he said that it's hard for our bodies to absorb curry powder, and [recommended the supplements Curamed and Curamin](#). And the mysterious "miracle" pill Protandim contains it as well.

I don't take a curcumin supplement, but am always planning to start—because the spice has also been linked to reduced risk of cancer, heart disease and chronic pain. What's been holding me back is the price, since these supplements ain't cheap. But now that Alzheimer's and Parkinson's have been added to the list of things that curcumin might prevent, that price tag might start to look like a bargain!

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