

Aging Happens: Becoming more optimistic about Alzheimer's

By Ellen Waldman

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I'm going to start this column with a quote from Dr. Deborah Gordon: "Five years ago, I might not have encouraged people to know their Alzheimer's risk: What are you going to do about it but worry more? That's not good for your brain!" This is no longer how she feels. She has changed her tune, inspired by the documented successes of Dr. Dale Bredesen.

From his website: "Dr. Bredesen is internationally recognized as an expert in the mechanisms of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease. He developed The Bredesen Protocol, a comprehensive personalized program designed to improve cognition and reverse cognitive decline. Continued research and testing by Dr. Bredesen has identified new and previously unrecognized causes of Alzheimer's disease. He authored the book, 'The End of Alzheimer's: The First Program to Prevent and Reverse Cognitive Decline.'"

Dr. Gordon founded Northwest Memory Center (NMC) also known as Northwest Memory Care, (NorthwestMemoryCare.com or NorthwestMemoryCenter.com; 541-482-8333) earlier this year, inspired by the success of her own work and that of others in the task of healing damaged brains. Her friendly office in Ashland is devoted to the repair and restoration of ailing brains, and committed to making healthy brains at any age.

Dr. Gordon invites all those who are curious to please join her at one of her public talks, which are open to everyone to attend at no charge. She speaks regularly on the last Tuesday of every month, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Smullin Health Education Center (2825 East Barnett Road, Medford). On Aug. 28, she will discuss "Sleep for Your Brain." Dr. Gordon also speaks bimonthly at Havurah Shir Hadash (185 Mountain Ave., Ashland). She will address "Treating Dementia Subtypes" from noon to 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 27. Register for both free talks through her office.

Here are a few questions and answers from Dr. Gordon about this protocol and changes in available treatments.

EW: Who might benefit from your protocols?

DG: The prevention of dementia is easier than treatment, and treatment in early stages is a lot easier than in later stages. While many patients have typical Alzheimer's, others have varied causes for their brains not working well: insulin resistance, sleep loss, brain-damaging medications, environmental toxins and more. Brain complaints range from loss of short-term memory and loss of smell (more typical Alzheimer's symptoms) to difficulties with organization tasks and maintenance of attention.

EW: What has changed in brain treatments?

DG: Drug companies have largely given up on a drug for Alzheimer's (hundreds of failed drug trials over the last 19 years, no new drugs, and no drugs at all that reverse the disease). Dr. Bredesen was encouraged by his functional medicine wife, Dr. Aida Lasheen, to explore the potential for diet and

lifestyle changes to reverse dementia. His first published study confirmed marked reversal of Alzheimer's disease in nine out of 10 patients, relying on interventions of diet, lifestyle, supplements, and hormonal prescriptions, all tailored to each individual. He has documented continued improvement in these nine individuals, including re-growth of brain volume on MRI testing. Since then, he's trained and worked with hundreds of physicians internationally, all of whom have exciting stories of patient improvement to share.

EW: How do you utilize this treatment protocol at NMC?

DG: Patients at NMC undergo a thorough and individual evaluation, including an interview, cognitive testing, laboratory tests and often an MRI. Each patient receives an individualized plan including a dietary plan tailored by a clinical nutritionist, support for healthy sleep patterns, encouragement with exercise (of body and brain), and recovery by some form of meditative practice. Supplements are always a part of the protocol, including prescription hormones for some people. NMC takes an "optimizing" view of lab results rather than a "normalizing." Here's an example: a vitamin B12 level might be at the very bottom of the normal range, and prevent certain deficiency diseases; a B12 level at the upper end of the normal range might enhance cognition and help to normalize other laboratory markers.

I hope you are as encouraged by this news as I am! If you have ever wondered what's next in the field of improving our brains, consider contacting Dr. Gordon's office and attending these public talks. You, and your brain, have everything to gain with this information.