

# On Your Mind

July 2006

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SARASOTA MEMORIAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

A decision as important as *life* itself.™

## SUPPORT GROUP

Support Group for persons with Mild Cognitive Impairment, Early stages of Alzheimer's disease and Memory Loss and their families.

**Next meeting:** July 20th  
9:30 a.m.

**Speaker:** Valerie Daverio, A.P., Dipl.Ac.

**Topic:** Herbs and Medication Interactions

**Location:** Senior Friendship Center-Center for Healthy Aging, 1900 Brother Geenen Way, Sarasota

## THE MEMORY DISORDER CLINIC

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Sponsored by Sarasota Memorial

Hospital and State of Florida

Department of Elder Affairs

## Maintain Your Brain!

It is suspected that exercising your brain in later life can promote healthy brain function and may even provide protection against memory decline and degenerative brain diseases. So what kinds of exercises are most beneficial to the aging brain? In fact, not only mental exercises such as Neurobics (explained below), reading, and intellectual stimulation, but also simple physical exercises such as wiggling your toes in the morning or walking, and for the avid exerciser, running are all good for the brain.

Research into brain function suggests that muscles activate brain receptors or chemical messengers. These messengers are important for a variety of thinking processes, one of which is memory. Physical exercise can be one step in preserving mental performance and protecting brain function. The first and easiest exercise is to just move your toes in the morning. This activates nerves that fuel your brain and internal organs. Walking is also a beneficial exercise. Walking increases blood circulation, including the oxygen and glucose that reach your brain. These are key players in learning, concentration, and abstract reasoning. If you are physically able, another brain healthy exercise is running. Running is often referred to as a "brain boost" and some studies suggest this type of physical exercise may actually increase the number of brain cells one has. In addition to these physical exercises or if physical limitations exist, in place of, mental exercises can provide some of the same benefits.

At every age, it is important to challenge and engage your brain. You can do this using "brain teasers" that are available in the daily paper or in books at your local bookstore. You can also do this by learning new, novel tasks such as playing chess, solitaire or even sculpturing. Considering the brain is a muscle, flexing your brain by reading or doing crossword puzzles or other challenging activities that you enjoy is also imperative. Neurobics is one distinctive system of brain exercises in which you use all five senses. Some of these exercises include: getting dressed with your eyes closed (relying on different senses than those typically used to accomplish an everyday task), eating with your opposite hand (breaking your normal routine), and listening to music while smelling flowers (combining two senses). Any and all of these mental and physical exercises can help to keep the aging brain fit and dynamic.

## Getting the Nutrients You Need

Although there is no specific diet for people with Alzheimer's Disease or memory impairment, maintaining a proper diet can help your brain and body work more efficiently and give you more energy. Here are some tips that may come in handy when trying to implement a suitable diet:

- ❖ The Basics
  - Eat a variety of foods from each food category (from the enclosed food pyramid)
  - Maintain your weight through a balance of food and exercise.
  - Choose foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol.
  - Limit sugars.
  - Moderate your use of salt.
  - Drink eight 8 oz. glasses of water per day (unless restricted due to another medical condition).
  - Check with your doctor to see if certain foods may interfere with your medications
- ❖ Preventing Constipation
  - Eat foods high in fiber (e.g. fruits, vegetables, and whole grains). Most of the fiber in fruit is found in the skins.
  - Exercise.
  - Drink plenty of water (see above)
  - Move your bowels when you feel the urge.
- ❖ General Tips
  - Eat slowly.
  - Cut your food into small pieces and chew it thoroughly.
  - Maintain your weight by eating smaller meals more frequently.

***Please keep the Food Guide Pyramid enclosed on your refrigerator for handy reference.***

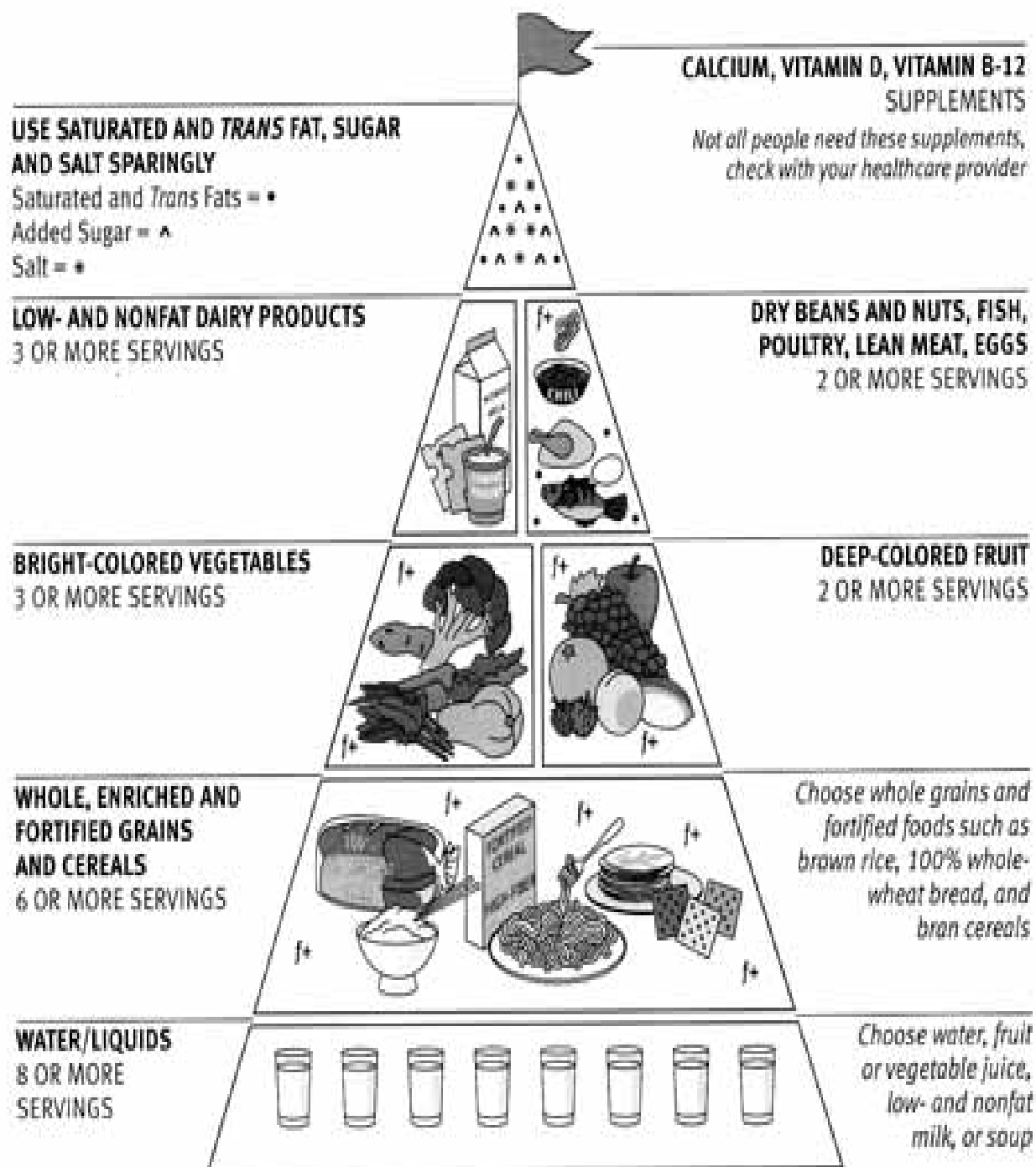
## What's on your mind?

**Q:** My mom has mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. She lives with my dad. Lately, I've noticed that my mom is losing weight. She eats very little. When my dad eats, she won't have anything saying she is full. Is there something we can do to help stimulate her appetite? Is lack of appetite associated with Alzheimer's disease?

**A:** Weight loss from poor appetite in a person with Alzheimer's disease can have many causes. Weight loss is not a common manifestation of Alzheimer's disease alone until very late, when immobility and muscle wasting can occur. The causes of weight loss in cognitively normal persons should be considered first- new medical problems, drugs, ill fitting denture or tooth decay and depression lead the list of possible causes. The search for a cause is complicated by the fact that doctors depend on the story of an illness. In Alzheimer's disease, so long as language and conversation remain, the affected person will accurately report feelings as they occur. However, by the time they reach the doctor, the story is misremembered and distorted. You can help by being alert to distress or discomfort, and asking her about how it feels, what seems to have brought it on, how long it lasts, what makes it better, and any other information that could be useful to diagnosis. Write this story down, and make sure the doctor hears it.

Mental health complications of Alzheimer's include depression and delusions. Depression is often associated with weight loss, and can be hard to identify in Alzheimer's persons. This is because the loss of initiative that is common in both Alzheimer's and depression. Also there is often an absence of sadness that is common in depression in older persons in general. If no medical cause is found for weight loss, depression should be considered. Treatment is effective- if she is depressed, a few weeks of treatment should produce a substantial improvement. Occasionally, delusions (that food is poisoned or spoiled) can interfere with eating, but this is generally reported by the affected person. Maintaining a healthy weight in persons with AD is important to health and safety – so keep trying.

# Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults



f+ High-fiber choices

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***“Comedy Corner”***

***Senility Prayer***

***God grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked, the good fortune to run into the ones I do and the eyesight to tell the difference.***



**News Flash!**

**The Johnnie Byrd Alzheimer’s Research Institute is now accepting research candidates**

Please contact Lorelei Lindenaux-Balazs MA for details. 941-917-7197

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**Free Memory Screenings**

The Memory Disorder Clinic offers free memory screenings at The Senior Friendship Centers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of every month in Sarasota and on the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of every month in Venice. Call (941) 917-7197 to schedule an appointment.

**Due to increased demand an additional screening location has been added.**

Location: 1921 Waldemere Street

When: Friday Afternoons by appointment only

Please call 917-7197 for details.

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**Sarasota Memorial Hospital**

**Memory Disorder Clinic**

**Administrative Office Location**

**1700 S. Tamiami Trail**

**Sarasota, FL 34239**

**(941) 917-7197**

**[www.sarasotageriatrics.com](http://www.sarasotageriatrics.com)**

**Clinic Locations**

**1921 Waldemere Street**

**Suite 403, Sarasota**

**929 S. Tamiami Trail**

**Suite 203. Osprey**