

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Is Alzheimer's in Our Genes?

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



Researchers are hard at work attempting to gain an understanding of risk factors that may increase a person's chances of developing Alzheimer's disease. To date, some clearly defined risk factors have emerged including being overweight, having diabetes, or leading a sedentary life. Genetic factors have recently been identified as well. And unlike the other factors listed above, there's obviously nothing you can do to change the genes that you inherit, or is there?

Without a doubt, the genes most studied in relation to Alzheimer's risk are called the APOE genes, and they come in three varieties, APOE-2, 3, and 4. Unlike APOE2 and 3, the APOE4 gene is associated with a dramatic risk for the disease as well as an earlier age of onset.

We now understand how the APOE genes affect risk for developing Alzheimer's disease. Simply stated, the good APOE genes, numbers 2 and 3 — unlike APOE4 — actually lead to better brain antioxidant function, reducing Alzheimer's risk by helping to prevent the brain from being damaged by harmful chemicals produced in the body called "free radicals."

Scientists are now studying how to bypass the increased Alzheimer's risk of the APOE4 gene by giving people higher levels of antioxidants. Meanwhile, since most of us don't know which genes we carry, eating an antioxidant rich diet with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains makes sense. While we can't change our genes, we can make lifestyle choices to offset inherited risks.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".