

alzheimer's association®

California Central Coast  
Chapter**Santa Barbara County**  
1528 Chapala St., #204  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
Tel: 805.892.4259120 E. Jones St, #113  
Santa Maria, CA 93454  
Tel: 805.636.6432**San Luis Obispo County**  
71 Zaca Lane #110  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
Tel: 805.547.3830**Ventura County**  
2580 E. Main St Suite 201  
Ventura, CA 93003  
Tel: 805.494.520024-Hour Helpline:  
**800.272.3900**

alz.org/CaCentral

## Understanding Research

*Marcy Maler MMFT, Art Therapy  
Educator & Care Specialist*

Once upon a time, not more than 35 years ago, dementia was thought to be a natural result of aging. But advances in research have enlightened—we now know that dementia is often caused by specific diseases. With such a high incidence worldwide, Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other dementias are a growing global health concern. Thus, research today is strongly motivated by the quest to find a cure. Researchers and modern medicine help us gain a better understanding of what is actually occurring inside the brain, allowing for greater disease identification, treatment, and management of symptoms.

With the increased research in this area there is also greater public awareness, which in turn brings more frequent declarations of “medical breakthroughs,” “cures,” and “clinical trial studies.” Because many of these claims are false, it is helpful to understand the difference between important building blocks in the search for a dementia cure and the expensive, dangerous, or ineffective treatments that merely raise false hope.

A growing number of herbal remedies, dietary supplements, and “medical foods” are promoted as memory enhancers or treatments to delay or prevent AD and related dementias. Although some of these remedies may have valid properties for treatments, there are legitimate concerns about using these supplements as an alternative to or in addition to physician-prescribed therapy. Claims about the safety and effectiveness of these products, however, are generally based on a rather



small body of scientific research. The rigorous scientific research that is required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the approval of a prescription drug is not required by law for the marketing of dietary supplements. Neither the content nor the effectiveness of the supplements have been verified, and there is a possibility that there may be an interaction with other clinically prescribed therapies that may put the patient at risk for an adverse reaction.

The Alzheimer's Association is the largest private, non-profit funder of AD and dementia research worldwide. The Association has awarded over \$405 million to more than 2,600 research projects. As a leader in Alzheimer's research, here are some things it looks for when assessing the credibility of research results:



**Studies that are done in large and diverse populations** and that have been replicated and independently confirmed by other outside researchers, preferably multiple times. These studies are generally performed by respected scientists at highly regarded research institutions, and are published in top-tier journals known for publishing the best research. The selection



## Tips & Tools

### Diagnosis & Early Detection

If you or a loved one have concerns about memory loss or other symptoms, it is important to be evaluated by a healthcare provider. With a diagnosis – especially one received early in the course of the disease – you can:

- Get the maximum benefit from available treatments.
- Increase your chances of participating in clinical drug trials that help advance research.
- Have more time to plan for the future.
- Participate in building the right care team and social support network.
- Get care and support services – making it easier for you and your family to live the best life possible with Alzheimer's.

of participants is highly controlled so that they are appropriate to the experiment being conducted.

To eliminate the possibility of bias in the results, it is important that the funding agencies do not have a commercial interest in the results of the study.

By Alzheimer's Association standards, less credible research results from:



**Single studies that have not been replicated** and/or confirmed. Even if the statistical calculations suggest the findings are credible, there may still be an element of chance or that some unforeseen or unaccounted-for factors are influencing the results.

**Studies done in small or homogeneous populations** may not be broadly applicable. For example, studies conducted among an isolated ethnic group (e.g., Caucasians only) make it difficult to tell if the findings will apply to other types of people.

**Studies done with groups selected by convenience** or with loosely controlled study populations raise questions about the applicability of the results.

**Studies funded by individuals or organizations** that have a commercial interest in the results.

*An important element to note is that studies using animal subjects can be (and often are) excellent science, but the results seen in animal models do not*

*necessarily mean that the results will have the same effects for humans.*



The Alzheimer's Association is determined to develop and deliver a more-specific recipe for risk reduction of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease dementia.

It is now possible to effectively prevent or treat ailments such as heart disease, cancer, and HIV/AIDS with combinations of drugs and lifestyle changes. In the not too distant future, the same may be true for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. This will only come through additional, large-scale research trials in diverse populations.

Recruiting and retaining participants for research studies is a huge obstacle to developing new and better treatments for the various forms of dementia. Research can only progress if people volunteer for clinical trials and studies. To address the growing need for clinical trial participants, the Alzheimer's Association launched Alzheimer's Association TrialMatch<sup>®</sup>—a clinical studies matching service that is free and easy to use (<http://www.alz.org/trialmatch>).

The database is continually updated, and currently contains more than 250 studies to choose from, including both drug and non-drug trials that are being conducted at sites across the country and online.

With your help we can advance research. Individuals with dementia or those who are at risk of developing it, as well as caregivers, and healthy volunteers who do not exhibit memory loss symptoms are needed today to help advance Alzheimer's research.