

HIDDEN MENTAL DECLINE ?

The British Journal of Nutrition reports that researchers at Ullevål University Hospital claim to have established that consuming additional fruit and in particular berries can lower the possibility of suffering Carotid Atherosclerosis (a.k.a. Carotid artery Disease). The fruit helps to reduce the amount of plaque building up on the inner walls of the artery thus helping to avoid a restriction of the flow of blood through the vessel. Maintaining the arterial blood flow is a significant factor in preventing strokes.

On a similar theme scientists at the John Hopkins University, USA, have suggested that lowering the levels of Uric acid in the blood could help reduce the occurrences of 'mini-strokes' or Transient Ischemic Attacks (TIA's)

TIA's are of particular importance because they can occur as single or multiple episodes without the individual necessarily being aware. An attack is likely to result in some limited damage to affected brain cells whilst repeated (perhaps unnoticed) attacks can have a cumulative effect leading to the possibility of mental decline and loss of cognitive functions.

As one who has unknowingly suffered one (perhaps more) TIA attack I am at least aware of the potential danger – I was fortunate in having an observant wife who insisted, against my protestations, that I get myself checked out -- A GP's appointment and an MRI scan later proved my denial wrong but put in place a medical regime to reduce the risk of further episodes.

The John Hopkins study indicates that high levels of uric acid in the blood may be a trigger for TIA's and that lowering the level would help prevent such attacks. Diet care can help since uric acid is produced when purines are metabolised by the body. Purines are to be found in a range of foods including liver, mackerel, dried peas and beans and in beer and wine.

As is so frequently the case moderation in all things appears to be the key since it has been suggested that uric acid against mental deterioration as caused by Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. But again anyone who has had the misfortune to suffer attacks of gout is likely to be much more concerned to reduce their uric acid level than to worry about their future brain function.