



ALZHEIMERS DISEASE

Horsebalm (*Monarda*, various species) Horsebalm contains the beneficial compound carvacrol, and thymol which Austrian scientists have discovered helps prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine. Some compounds in horsebalm apparently can cross the blood-brain barrier. Normally your body's protective blood-brain barrier helps prevent harmful substances in the blood from reaching the tissues of the brain. But because this blood-brain barrier sometimes works too well, it can also prevent helpful medicines from reaching the brain.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) Some evidence suggests that oxidative damage caused by highly reactive (free radical) oxygen molecules in the body plays a role in Alzheimer's. If that's so, rosemary should help. It contains a couple of dozen antioxidants--that is, compounds that help mop up free radicals. Among the antioxidants is a particularly potent one, rosmarinic acid. Rosemary also contains a half-dozen compounds that are reported to prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine.

Brazil nut (*Bertholettia excelsa*) In addition to looking into treatments focused on preventing the breakdown of acetylcholine, researchers have also been studying possible treatments that will supplement people's supply of choline, a building block for acetylcholine.

Lecithin contains choline, and Brazil nuts are the richest food sources of lecithin (up to 10 percent on a dry-weight basis). Many other plant foods and herbs also contain generous amounts of lecithin. They include, in descending order of potency, dandelion flowers, poppy seeds, soybeans and mung beans.

There are also a number of plants, including fenugreek leaves and shepherd's purse, that contain choline itself. Other plant foods and herbs that contain small amounts of choline include horehound, ginseng, cowpea, English pea, mung beans, sponge gourd, lentils and Chinese angelica, also known as dong-quai.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). These flowers are one of our better sources of lecithin, and they're also a reasonable source of choline (the two often show up in the same foods). Lecithin increases concentrations of acetylcholine in the brain and improves memory in laboratory mice. There's no proof yet that this treatment works in people.

Fava beans (*Vicia faba*). These beans are quite rich in lecithin.

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) In addition to being a fantastic source of choline (up to 1.3 percent on a dry-weight basis), Fenugreek greens are also a good source of beta-carotene, an antioxidant that might also help prevent or slow the progression of Alzheimer's.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*). British researchers have confirmed that sage inhibits the enzyme that breaks down acetylcholine, thus preserving the compound that seems to help prevent and treat Alzheimer's. Like rosemary, sage is also well-endowed with antioxidants. Just be judicious: Sage contains a fair amount of thujone, a compound that in very high doses may cause convulsions.

Nettle (stinging nettle) (*Urtica dioica*). This herb contains considerable amounts of the mineral boron, which can double levels of the hormone estrogen circulating in the body. And estrogen, tested in several studies, helped improve short-term memory and also helped elevate the moods of some people with Alzheimer's.