



What Disease Do You Fear The Most?

By Paula Wolfson | September 17, 2014

A new poll shows that Alzheimer's is the disease Americans fear most, even those in their 20's and 30's.

The finding showed up in a survey on retirement planning conducted by Merrill Lynch and Age Wave, a firm that studies aging issues. While the target of the researchers was baby boomers, they found that concern about Alzheimer's transcends generations.

"There is no question that this is now inter-generational," says George Vradenburg, chairman and founder of the advocacy group [USAgainstAlzheimer's](#).

Vradenburg says there is a certain fear factor connected to the disease and predicts that "we are going to see a number of people in their earlier years beginning to be much more attentive to their brain health."

Some with a family history of the disease see what happened to their grandparents or parents and worry that it may happen to them. A few prevention programs at major medical facilities across the country have sensed this need, and are now offering help to hold it at bay.

"There is some emerging evidence that a suite of behavioral activities over the course of your life may have the effect of either slowing or deferring the onset of the disease," says Vradenburg.

At present, there is no way to categorically prevent Alzheimer's, but research has indicated there are steps a healthy young person can take to either slow or defer the onset of the disease decades later.

Diet and exercise top the list, as does keeping blood pressure in check. Another option is to engage in cognitive exercises designed to build the strength of the brain by building capacity to analyze and think more coherently.

The whole concept is relatively new, and Vradenburg cautions the results won't be known until the 20 or 30-somethings employing these techniques are in their 60's and 70's.

"But we do know that it can't hurt," he says, adding those with a family history or at genetic risk might benefit in their later years from preventative measures.

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