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Folic acid plus B12 shows brain function benefits in older people

By Nathan Gray, 20-Dec-2011

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Long term supplementation of folic acid and vitamin B12 may promote improvements in brain functioning in older people, according to new research.

The study – published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* – investigated whether oral supplementation of folic acid and vitamin B12 reduced cognitive decline in older people with high levels of psychological distress.

The research, led by Janine Walker from the Australian National University, is the latest study to find a potential link between supplementation of the vitamins and potential benefits to brain functions – with the researchers reporting that a daily oral dose of folic acid and vitamin B12 “promotes improvement in cognitive functioning after 24 months, particularly in immediate and delayed memory performance.”



"Who are you calling senile!? Bring me my B12 young'n..."

Cognitive decline

Brain functioning is known to naturally decline as we age, however there is evidence to suggest that both folic acid and vitamin B12 play important roles in healthy brain aging – with many studies suggesting that low levels of the nutrients can lead to more rapid deteriorations in cognitive functions.

Such declines in functions are often a warning sign of dementia – a term used to describe various different brain disorders that a progressive loss of brain functioning in common. There are many types of dementia, the most common of which being Alzheimer's disease.

Long-term deficiencies in vitamins such as B12, folate, and niacin, are known to have similar effects on the brain degeneration, leading to the suspicion that such vitamins play a role in the development of dementia.

Research highlights

Walker and her team conducted the randomised controlled trial with a completely crossed factorial design. The two-year long intervention compared a daily oral dose of 400 micrograms of folic acid plus 100 micrograms of vitamin B-12 to a placebo.

Main outcome measures examined change in cognitive functioning at 12 and 24 months by using the Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status-Modified (TICS-M) and the Brief Test of Adult Cognition by Telephone – to test processing speed.

The authors reported that after 24 months, folic acid plus vitamin B12 improved the TICS-M total, TICS-M immediate, and TICS-M delayed recall scores in comparison with placebo. However the team found no significant changes in orientation, attention, semantic memory, processing speed, or informant reports.

Source: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*

Published online ahead of print, doi: [10.3945/ajcn.110.007799](https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.110.007799)

"Oral folic acid and vitamin B-12 supplementation to prevent cognitive decline in community-dwelling older adults with depressive symptoms—the Beyond Ageing Project: a randomized controlled trial"

Authors: J.G. Walker , P.J. Batterham , A.J. Mackinnon , A.F. Jorm , I. Hickie , et al

Keywords: [B12](#), [cognitive](#)

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