

There are several ways to hold back Alzheimers

By KATHY SCOTT

He was an educated, well-spoken, compassionate and gentle man and he could not remember my name. My father's beloved personality was lost, or trapped, somewhere inside his dementia.

To watch him spiral into a pit of darkness and bewilderment was heart-wrenching. Now as my mother's memory begins to fade, my siblings and I wonder if dementia is in our future. If we forget where we have parked the car are we stepping onto that terrifying path of forgetfulness and fear? What can we do to keep our memories intact when family genetics point toward memory impairment?

ment?

Scientists are constantly researching diseases that cause dementia. Different drugs are currently being tested. These drugs may someday be used to keep dementia at bay or even reverse it. Since Alzheimer's, for instance, does not usually strike until later years, holding back the consequences of the disease for a couple of years can be extremely helpful.

A couple of discoveries of importance include the use of anti-inflammatory drugs,

vitamin E and estrogen. It seems that people with arthritis have a lower occurrence of dementia. Swelling of the brain occurs at some point in dementia and if anti-inflammatory drugs reduce swelling arthritic joints, then they may well reduce inflammation of the brain. Many of us frequently consume anti-inflammatory drugs and do not even realize that we may be doing our brains a favor. Vitamin E is a simple over-the-counter attempt to keep our minds clear for a little longer.

Estrogen, a common hormone offered to menopausal and peri-menopausal women, is also reputed to delay some of dementia's nightmarish symptoms. This treatment has not been absolutely proven but some women who take an estrogen replacement do find some success in maintaining memory.

Some of our everyday activities may have to be altered to protect us from dementia. Research suggests that if you are pre-disposed

to a certain type of Alzheimer's disease, you would do well to stay away from high-fat foods. Since more and more of us are attempting to cut high-fat food out of our diets, we can consider this practice a good one for our heads as well as our hearts. Keep track of your blood pressure. High blood pressure may cause a reduction in blood to the brain. Making sure that your blood pressure is within normal limits is another easily accomplished precaution to take. Play games, read, take a college course—do anything that exercises your mind. Wear your seat belt when you drive or ride.

Protect your head by wearing a helmet when you ride a bicycle, motorcycle or any other form of transportation. Take your vitamins and eat your fruits and vegetables. These common activities and precautions are something we can do now before

we reach the age of maximum danger.

Oh, and about that lost car question? Experts say that from time to time we all forget where we have parked the car. So don't panic unnecessarily.



Staff photo by Lib Stewart

SERVING THE COMMUNITY - The Bessemer City Health Care Center located behind Bessemer City Middle School may be the best kept secret for health care in western Gaston County. The center, staffed by nurse practitioner Sherley Brito, offers medical services to all ages.

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comes to preparing Mexican dishes, he rarely deviates from their diet, preparing vegetables they both like to eat.

Bessemer City Health Care Center could be one of the best kept secrets in the greater Bessemer City area. Planning began for the satellite clinic in 1994. The health center opened in 1998 and is funded through grants to provide a convenient, local health care facility for the community. The center continues to be governed by Advocates for Healthy Citizens, a board of school, community and

health care representatives.

Brito sees 15 to 16 patients on a daily basis. She diagnoses, refers to specialists when necessary, prescribes medications, operates an in-house laboratory and provides electrocardiograms and immunizations, among other duties.

Family roots are important to the Brito family. She recalled that growing up in Costa Rica the siblings use both their parents' last

names, but when a woman is married she takes her husband's last name.

"This means you belong to that person," said Brito.

Brito's youngest patient is

18 months of age and her oldest patient is 93. Her three-person staff includes receptionist Pamela Seagle and nursing assistant Olita Conrad. Conrad, of Smyrna SC, a certified medical assistant, has been with the clinic since it opened.

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