



# STAYING SHARP IN RETIREMENT

**A**fter 10 years as the Regional and subsequently, Global Healthcare Nutrition Science Director at Danone, Madam Yee Fui Tai, a Registered Dietician, is looking forward to spending more time with friends and family as well as pursuing her various other interests. We spoke with her on her plans for retirement and gained some valuable insights on how to maintain an active mind and body.

**Q: As many as 1 in 10 adults in Singapore will develop dementia over their lifetimes. Can you explain what happens when our brains age?**

**A:** Our brains communicate via a vast network of connections known as synapses. Throughout our lifetimes, our brains continuously lose and replace its synapses. However, as we grow older, the process may become unbalanced with more connections lost than replaced. This leads to impaired memory. Almost 40% of people over the age of 65 will experience some form of memory loss<sup>[1]</sup>. When there is no underlying medical condition, this is known as 'age-associated memory impairment'. Dementia is an illness which causes brain cells to be damaged at a faster rate than is associated with normal ageing.

**Q. Do you think nutritional supplements are necessary as we age?**

**A:** Yes, because many older adults have challenges in eating a healthy balanced diet with sufficient quantities of the recommended food groups to obtain the right amount of nutrients. This could be due to reduced physical activity leading to lower caloric requirement, chronic diseases and other factors.

**Q: What nutrients are essential for keeping us alert and our memories in tip top shape?**

**A:** Energy as well as nutrients are required to keep us alert. I will highlight a few of the key ones. **Phospholipids** are a class of lipids and a major component of brain cell membrane. **Omega 3 fatty acids - DHA, EPA and uridine monophosphate (UMP)**, a nucleotide, are important building blocks for phospholipids.

**Choline** helps in the production of acetylcholine, a key neurotransmitter in the brain, responsible for learning, sustaining attention and memory. Neurotransmitters are like vehicles which carry signals from one part of the brain to another. An insufficient concentration of acetylcholine has been shown to be associated with memory loss associated with Alzheimer's disease.

**Vitamin B6** is significant for protein, carbohydrate and fat metabolism to generate energy and also produce neurotransmitters.

**Vitamin B12** plays a role in the synthesis of myelin - an insulating layer around our nerves. This insulating layer plays an important role in ensuring that electrical impulses can travel back and forth from the brain to the various parts of the body efficiently.

**Q: How can nutritional supplements help with brain health?**

**A:** The advantage of nutritional supplements is that we can obtain the right combination at the right levels of specific nutrients to help the formation of new synapses or connections and thus, to maintain brain function.

**Q: What does your daily diet look like?**

**A:** My diet resembles the typical recommended diet that helps keep me fit and prevents chronic diseases. It is low in fat and sodium but high in fibre as my diet is heavily plant-based. I have fish like salmon at least thrice a week. I enjoy soy milk and bean curd which are good sources of protein and B group vitamins. I do not over eat and keep an eye on my BMI.

**Q: Outside of supplements, what tips do you have to keep yourself mentally alert and physically agile?**

**A:** Brisk walking is my daily exercise and I target at least 10,000 steps per day. I enjoy reading and playing the piano. My favourite pastime is watching international documentaries and drama on Netflix. During the weekends, I sometimes bake healthy bread.

**Q: What are you most looking forward to doing now that you have more time?**

**A:** I plan to travel to visit my children who are working overseas. I will also spend more time with my mum who is 96 years old and lives with my siblings in Malaysia. My incredible mum is still mentally, physically and socially active. She eats a varied diet and takes nutrient supplements regularly. Her hobby is to walk around her garden and admire the flowers, fruits and vegetables.

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