How Modifying Lifestyle Might Help Lawyers Prevent the Onset of Alzheimer’s Disease

By Lawrence Altman, JD

Introduction
In August of 2014 an article was published in the Lancet:Neurology that discussed findings from a research study concluding that up to a third of the reported cases of Alzheimer’s disease could have been prevented if, prior to the onset of the disease, people had made six lifestyle changes, all that were within their control. In an article published by Time Magazine, this study and others were discussed. In addition, in the September 2016 AARP Bulletin, an article was published discussing the results of clinical studies suggesting that exercise might not prevent Alzheimer’s but it could lessen the risk of the onset of the disease by fifty percent. “Studies even suggest that people who are physically active, ‘have lower rates of Alzheimer’s and other age-associated neurological disorders,’ says Arthur F. Kramer, senior vice provost of research and graduate education at Northeastern University in Boston and an expert on exercise and the brain.” What follows is a discussion of some of the highlights from the studies and the two articles.

The Six Lifestyle Changes
A. Take care of your heart.
Reducing the risk of heart disease is the first and perhaps most important lifestyle change. Exercise is a key component along with proper treatment of high blood pressure, high lipids, obesity, and Type 2 diabetes.

B. Exercise.
The Global Counsel of Brain Health has published recommendations for brain health through exercise. The recommendations:

1. 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity aerobic exercise.
2. Strength training at least twice each week.
Cardio exercise includes but is not limited to walking, cycling, and running. And strength training includes but is not limited to yoga, weight training, Tai Chi, and Pilates. Regarding weight training, instead of using weights, the use of resistance bands will also supply the needed strength training.

Doing things that are engaging intellectually have also been shown to help prevent the onset of Alzheimer’s. Reading and writing of papers are examples.

D. Be Social.
Studies show the loneliness is a contributing factor to the one set of Alzheimer’s. Treat Depression. The richer a person’s social life the better is the chance of preventing the onset of the Disease. Indeed, the Global Counsel on Brain Health suggests that exercising with others not only helps motivate people to exercise but also is a means of improving a person’s social life.

E. Treat Depression.
Some studies suggest that people who are depressed and fail to obtain proper treatment have double the risk of having Alzheimer’s as those people who are not depressed or who have depression but obtain proper treatment. That said the studies have not concluded whether or not the chances of being diagnosed with depression is higher for people who have Alzheimer’s or whether it is the other way around.

F. Get Good Sleep.
Studies support the clinical findings that poor sleep habits increase the possibility of having Alzheimer’s. And for some, increased exercise is also a means for improving sleep quality thereby reducing the risk of having Alzheimer’s.

CONCLUSION
Medical science has, for many years, looked for the cure of Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. Although there has been some success, the cure has been allusive. That said medical science has turned to looking for preventive measures that people might be able to use to prevent the onset of Alzheimer’s. And they may have found it: Exercise. Indeed the United States National Institutes of Health intends to publish the findings from a new study in 2017 proving that exercise is medicine.\textsuperscript{xiii} So, there is hope on the horizon for those who fear the onset of Alzheimer’s. And there is no pill required. Accordingly dedicating less than an hour a day to do at least moderate exercise may be the answer.

\textsuperscript{1} Volume 13, No.5, p752-753, titled \textit{Capitalizing on Modifiable Risk Factors for Alzheimer’s Disease}, by Geert Jan Bissels

\textsuperscript{ii} \textit{Untangling Alzheimer’}, by Mandy Oaklander, \textit{Time}, August 22, 2016.

\textsuperscript{iii} \textit{Keeping Your Brain Young By Staying Fit}, by Elizabeth Agnvall, AARP Bulletin, September, 2016, P.26

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\textsuperscript{vii} \textit{Your Brain Young By Staying Fit}, by Elizabeth Agnvall, AARP Bulletin, September, 2016, P.26

\textsuperscript{viii} \textit{The New Science of Exercise}, By Mandy Oaklander, Time Magazine, September 12/19, 2016