

Second Front

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Phoenix doctor develops Alzheimer's prevention program



Paul Bendheim



James Tonkin

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A Phoenix neurologist is launching a program to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. After spending three years developing the program and testing it in Scottsdale, BrainSavers is rolling out its concept nationally.

Dr. Paul Bendheim, who recently left the Banner Alzheimer's Institute to start

the venture, joined James Tonkin to market the system.

The program combines brain exercises, physical fitness and nutrition to stimulate the mind and body to help protect against memory impairment linked to aging.

The \$349 package — a software program, a supply of nutritional bars, and a book written by Bendheim — will be

available at health and fitness clubs and via Amazon.com.

When these components are used together in a lifestyle regimen, the combination enhances brain health and reduces the risk for memory loss and Alzheimer's disease, Bendheim said.

Dr. Pierre Tariot, director of the mem-

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BRAINSAVERS: *Local doctor to sell BrainSavers package through Amazon.com*

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ory disorders center at Banner Alzheimer's Institute, said Bendheim showed the concept to him after he left the institute to start his new company.

"I'm not a business person, so I cannot comment from the business side. But there's little doubt in my mind that society is ready for guidance for healthy brain aging," Tariot said. "With the pending wave of baby boomers turning 65, a lot of people are going to be very interested in these concepts."

The Alzheimer's Association recently re-

leased figures showing 78,000 Arizonans have Alzheimer's. By 2010, that figure is expected to increase to 97,000.

"The scary statistic that we all keep in mind is that half of those who reach the age of 85 will suffer a dementia," Tariot said. "We are all desperately seeking ways to stave that off."

He said the concept of brain wellness is new, slowly following the highly touted heart-healthy wellness lifestyle.

Dr. Steven Ferris, a Friedman professor and director of the Alzheimer's Disease Center at the New York University School of Medicine, is on the BrainSavers scientific advisory board.

"I think what is very interesting about BrainSavers is they're taking a broad approach at this, and they're not saying there's any simple magic bullet here, which there isn't," Ferris said. "And to their credit, they are taking a very evidence-based approach. They're not claiming things that aren't based on some scientific support."

He said future evidence will back up the program's approach. "Ultimately, someone is going to need to take the BrainSavers program and actually test it in a randomized, controlled trial," Ferris said.

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Dr. Steven Ferris

New York University School of Medicine

"I'm sure they'll do it. At this point, there's bits and pieces of evidence that support it."

Tariot said he would like to talk more with Bendheim to see about conducting clinical trials together.

"The evidence is not ironclad," Tariot said. "It's suggestive, but not conclusive."

Bendheim said the Scottsdale Resort and Athletic Club hosted the world's first complete trial of the program. In that test, 85 percent of the subjects showed an average of 16 percent improvement in 13 of the 17 cognitive abilities evaluated. Plus, he said, 92 percent of the participants reported subjective increases in memory capability.

According to Benheim, the nutritional bars contain ingredients to feed the brain, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and olive oil. He said the bars are designed to supplement a brain-healthy diet, not to replace it. The company has a patent pending on the nutritional bars and the program.

Tonkin, a Valley-based entrepreneur, hopes eventually to sell the package at drug chains and supermarkets. The system targets individuals 50 and older.

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Dr. Paul Bendheim's BrainSavers program includes these nutrition bars, designed as dietary supplements.