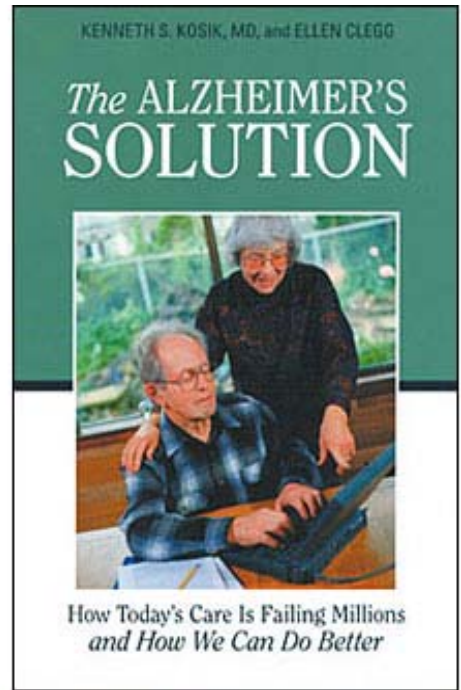


By DAVE MASON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER





At top, taking an entire new attitude toward Alzheimer's is stressed in "The Alzheimer's Solution: How Today's Care Is Failing Millions and How We Can Do Better" (Prometheus Books, \$19). The book is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Above, Christy Benson, 57, who has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, works on following instructions, watching and listening through a music game at Cognitive Fitness & Innovative Therapies. Standing by is Carrie Grabenauer, CFIT's care coordinator. Ms. Benson started coming to CFIT after experiencing memory problems, but so far, testing there has shown no signs of Alzheimer's.

NIK BLASKOVICH / NEWS-PRESS

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Christy Benson said she started having memory problems.

"My neurologist gently shoved me here," she said at Cognitive Fitness & Innovative Therapies, a one-stop place for counseling, assessments and exercises to sharpen the mind. On this day, the 57-year-old Carpinteria resident, who has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, was working on listening, watching and following instructions as she played Wii computer games related to music. In one, as care coordinator Carrie Grabenauer advised her, Ms. Benson had to match pitches as she watched the flat-screen TV at CFIT, which leases space at Cottage Rehabilitation Hospital on De la Vina Street.

"I always go out feeling like I'm wide opened!" said Ms. Benson, a former Cottage Hospital nurse, grinning even as she struggled with the games. "I feel like I can handle much more since I've come here."

CFIT, which was started by Dr. Kenneth S. Kosik, co-director of the Neuroscience Research Institute at UCSB, is an example of what he calls "brain shops" — community cognitive centers that he would like to see established across the country. They could help people with cognitive problems and those who are at risk of Alzheimer's. That includes people who have a family history of the disease such as Ms. Benson. Her mother, Victoria Benson, died from the disease in 2003. But Ms. Benson said so far, tests at CFIT show there are no signs that she has Alzheimer's.

Even those with the gene thought to trigger Alzheimer's, APOE-4, can reduce the risks of getting it through exercise, diet, cognitive challenges, stress reduction and social contact — anything and everything to keep the brain healthy and active, Dr. Kosik stressed repeatedly on a recent morning at his sixth-floor office of the Bio-2 building at UCSB. Those are points that he emphasized in his new book, "The Alzheimer's Solution: How Today's Care Is Failing Millions and How We Can Do Better" (Prometheus Books, \$19). He co-wrote it with health-care journalist Ellen Clegg of the Boston Globe, and he said the best way to find it is at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

As the title implies, the book is about changing society's entire attitude toward the disease, which, Dr. Kosik wrote, is not an inevitable aspect of aging.

It's a national, state and local problem. The number of Santa Barbara County residents 55 and older diagnosed with Alzheimer's reached 8,148 in 2008 and is projected to be 13,209, an increase of 62 percent, in 2030, said Arlene Stepputat, director of programs at the Central Coast chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

And nationally, she said, the number of deaths because of Alzheimer's has risen 42 percent since 2009.

Dr. Kosik's book warns of a growing Alzheimer's epidemic as the baby boomer generation turns gray. It cites Alzheimer's Association figures that 7.7 million Americans will have Alzheimer's by 2030 and as many as 16 million could have it by 2050.

"From science will come a cure," he told the News-Press. "But what do we do while we're waiting for a cure?"

"We need to be more proactive," said Dr. Kosik, who became co-director of the Neuroscience Research Institute in 2004 with



"From science will come a cure," said Dr. Kenneth S. Kosik, co-director of the Neuroscience Research Institute at UCSB, about Alzheimer's disease. "But what do we do while we're waiting for a cure?" His answer is "brain shops" to reduce the risks for the disease, which he covers in his book, "The Alzheimer's Solution: How Today's Care Is Failing Millions and How We Can Do Better."

MIKE ELIASON / NEWS-PRESS



"I feel like I can handle much more since I've come here," said Christy Benson about CFIT, where she gets both physical and mental exercises and counseling.

NIK BLASKOVICH / NEWS-PRESS

Dr. Stuart Feinstein. Dr. Kosik founded a memory disorder clinic at Harvard Medical School, where he was a professor from 1980 to 2004.

"The medical risks (for Alzheimer's) are the same as cardiovascular: cholesterol, blood pressure, tendency for diabetes," Dr. Kosik said. "It's now been shown that the risks for cardiovascular disease are the risks for Alzheimer's disease."

Data demonstrates exercise and the proper diet, including green vegetables and fish, benefit the mind as well as the body, the 59-year-old Philadelphia native said.

Knowing they have the gene for Alzheimer's, just like knowing about high cholesterol in fighting heart disease, alerts patients to eat better, exercise more and take other steps to reduce the risk, Dr. Kosik said.

They can benefit from new cognitive challenges — even something such as figuring out the seating arrangements for a dinner party — to keep the brain stimulated. And it's crucial to lessen chronic stress, Dr. Kosik added. His book goes one step further and says that being happy — "the best stress reliever we know" — helps to reduce the risk for Alzheimer's.

"Having friends is also good for the brain," he told the News-Press. "Successful aging is associated with a network with friends. The elderly are particularly vulnerable to isolation as friends and spouses die and their social circle constricts.

"The brain shop addresses all these things," he said.

Ms. Benson agreed. She said she likes the social aspect of working with therapists and other clients in group exercises. "I don't have a lot of social contact" outside CFIT.

Noted Dr. Kosik, "This book puts forth that what we need is brain shops where people can get information. It's not rocket science."

"For Alzheimer's patients or those at risk of Alzheimer's, we don't have any surgery, and the few medications we have are like bandages. They don't slow the progression of the disease," said Dr. Kosik, who earned his medical degree in 1976 at the Medical College of Pennsylvania.

"There are a few medicines that might help a modest number of people," he said.

Since opening in 2009, CFIT, a nonprofit, has helped 55 to 60 clients by evaluating their risks and helping them to reduce them, Dr. Kosik, its executive director, said. "I can't say what we're doing will prevent Alzheimer's disease. I certainly can't say it will cure it. But risk reduction is all we have."

One goal of writing "Alzheimer's Solution" is to promote the establishment of brain shops elsewhere in the U.S., he said. The doctor added he's in discussions with others to start them at the Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage, New York City and Boston. He added he would love it if others imitated CFIT.

In Santa Barbara, CFIT offers memory screenings; medical, physical and cognitive assessments; cardiovascular exercises; games to promote cognitive activity; counseling; medical guidance and personalized nutrition programs. Some therapies incorporate things such as music, and some exercises are done by groups to promote socialization.

There's even tai chi.

In conjunction with LifeChronicles, another Santa Barbara nonprofit, CFIT provides videotaping of clients to preserve their memories.

But "we're not equipped (at CFIT) to help someone with advanced Alzheimer's," Dr. Kosik said.

Research on Alzheimer's lags behind other diseases in getting donations for funding, he said. "I think sometimes people aren't as sympathetic with afflictions for people who are older. They think, 'They're older; they've lived their life.' "

Cognitive centers such as CFIT are not the ultimate solution for Alzheimer's disease.

"What we need is research to wipe out this disease," said Dr. Kosik. "Just like we've done with polio and smallpox."

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**FYI**

Cognitive Fitness & Innovative Technologies offers physical fitness programs, cognitive challenge exercises, music therapy, assessments, guidance on nutrition, video memory archiving, genetic testings and other services at 2409 De la Vina St. For more information, call the center at 899-7777 or go to [www.sbcfit.org](http://www.sbcfit.org).