

Fueling Your Mind: Nutrition For Brain Health

Most people are aware of how nutrition can impact many aspects of our health. Cardiovascular health, blood sugar control, and weight management are often the ones that come to mind first. But many people may not think of the way that nutrition can aid in protecting your brain against aging. Let's explore some key dietary strategies and nutrients that can support a healthy, resilient brain.

Key Nutrients for Brain Health

Omega-3 Fatty acids

Omega 3 fatty acids, specifically EPA and DHA, are vital. They support neural communication, reduce inflammation, and are linked to improved cognitive performance. Studies have shown that individuals who consume or supplement Omega 3 fatty acids have increases in learning, memory, cognitive well-being, and blood flow in the brain¹.

Food sources of Omega 3 Fatty Acids:

Fatty Fish

- salmon, mackerel, tuna, herring, and sardines

Nuts and seeds

- Flaxseed, chia seeds, and walnuts

Plant oils

- such as flaxseed oil, soybean oil, and canola oil)

Fortified foods

- Certain brands of eggs, yogurt, juices, milk, soy beverages, and infant formulas)

Antioxidants

Specifically, anthocyanins are a type of antioxidant and give fruit rich red, blue, and purple colors. They are part of a group of antioxidants called polyphenols. Anthocyanins help neutralize free radicals and reduce inflammation in the body. They have been associated with improved memory and reduced risk of neurodegenerative diseases².

Food Sources of Anthocyanins:

Blueberries

Cranberries

Tart Cherry Juice

Blackberries

Cherries

Red Onion

The MIND Diet: Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay

The MIND diet is a combination of the Mediterranean diet and DASH diet specifically designed to promote brain health. It does this by combining the principles from the Mediterranean diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats, with the DASH diet, known for lowering blood pressure.

The MIND diet emphasizes the consumption of:

- Leafy green vegetables (spinach, kale, collards) due to their high levels of nutrients like vitamin K, lutein, and folate. 2 or more servings per day.
- Berries (blueberries, strawberries) because of their high antioxidant content. 2-5 servings per week.
- Nuts, which provide healthy fats, vitamin E, and anti-inflammatory compounds. Aim for 5 servings per week
- Whole grains such as oats, brown rice, and quinoa for sustained energy and improved blood flow, 3 servings per day
- Fish (especially fatty fish like salmon) for omega-3 fatty acids, at least once

per week. At least one serving per week.

- Olive oil as a primary fat source

It also encourages individuals to limit foods such as red and processed meats, saturated fats, full fat cheese, refined grains, fried foods and foods high in added sugars. Studies show that adherence to the MIND diet can significantly reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease by up to 53% and slow age-related cognitive decline. Regularly incorporating these foods into your diet can enhance memory, attention, and overall mental clarity³.



Sources:

1. Dighriri IM, Alsubaie AM, Hakami FM, Hamithi DM, Alshekh MM, Khobrani FA, Dalak FE, Hakami AA, Alsueaadi EH, Alsaawi LS, Alshammari SF, Alqahtani AS, Alawi IA, Aljuaid AA, Tawhari MQ. Effects of Omega-3 Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids on Brain Functions: A Systematic Review. *Cureus*. 2022 Oct 9;14(10):e30091. doi: 10.7759/cureus.30091. PMID: 36381743; PMCID: PMC9641984.
2. Zaa CA, Marcelo ÁJ, An Z, Medina-Franco JL, Velasco-Velázquez MA. Anthocyanins: Molecular Aspects on Their Neuroprotective Activity. *Biomolecules*. 2023 Oct 31;13(11):1598. doi: 10.3390/biom13111598. PMID: 38002280; PMCID: PMC10669056
3. *What is the MIND Diet?*. Eatrightpro.org. (2023, December 20). <https://www.eatrightpro.org/news-center/practice-trends/what-is-the-mind-diet>

Would you like to work with a Registered Dietitian?
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