



Food & Brain Health

Myth: I can focus on a few healthy foods and not worry about the rest of my diet.

What does the research say? We need a large variety of nutrients to support optimal brain function. While some foods may be high in antioxidants, others will be high in other healthful nutrients. Unless you choose foods across all food groups and across all classes of foods within a food group, you run the risk of not meeting all your nutritional needs. You don't have to give up all your "treats" – but they should be eaten only in moderation.



What does this mean for me? Many styles of cooking (e.g. Asian, North American, and European) can support better brain health as they are rich in fruits, vegetables, and grains and low in fat and highly processed foods. Select low-fat dairy products, choose whole grains over refined grains, and embrace balance, moderation, and variety.

How do I apply this in my daily life?

- Be sure to rely on fish, poultry, dairy products, nuts and beans as your best choices for lean, brain-healthy protein.
- Replace saturated fat with monounsaturated fat sources, by using olive and canola oils, which helps to lower cholesterol. In addition to increasing your risk for heart disease, high saturated fat diets are also implicated in accelerated cognitive decline and dementia risk.



- Since over 75% of the sodium we eat is found in processed food, moving toward home-prepared meals that draw on fresh ingredients will help you reduce your sodium intake.
- Snack on nuts, fresh fruit, chopped vegetables, and low-fat yogurt.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Include colourful vegetables and fruits at each meal. Antioxidants help protect tissues, including the brain, from oxidative stress and inflammation and may reduce the effects of age-related conditions.
- Add beans or legumes to soups, stews and stir-fries.

Recommended Resources and Activities:

- Try out one of these 3 delicious recipes – [MINDfull cookbook](#)
- Brain Health Food Guide on page 3
- Dietitians of Canada - [Unlock Food](#)
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada – [Health Eating](#)

Adapted from MINDfull: Over 100 Delicious Recipes for Better Brain Health. The Baycrest Centre Foundation: 2012. Available in [e-book](#) format.





Simple diet changes have a powerful effect on brain health

The Brain Health Food Guide is for adults who want to retain cognitive function and brain health as they age. The guide is based on studies of adults 50 years of age and older who changed their diet and found these benefits:

- After four months of eating well, they performed as if they were nine years younger on tests of reading and writing speed¹
- After four years of eating well, they did not experience any memory loss²

Dietary patterns similar to the Brain Health Food Guide are associated with:

- 36 percent lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease³
- 27 percent lower risk of developing mild cognitive impairment or pre-dementia³

With a nutritious variety of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, fish, nuts and low-fat dairy products, the Brain Health Food Guide offers the same eating plan that's recommended to prevent or treat heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and other conditions.

Consult with your health care provider to help you adapt these recommendations to meet your specific needs.



Eating for brain health is all about..

- Embracing balance, moderation and variety (see back for guide)
- Focusing on an overall pattern of healthy eating, not one one specific "superfood" for brain health
- Making sure you eat until you are comfortably full and not stuffed
- Enjoying lots of vegetables and fruit
- Eating raw leafy vegetables daily, including lettuce, kale and spinach
- Eating fish, beans, and nuts several times a week
- Including healthy fats in the diet, from olive oil, nuts and fish
- Limiting red and processed meat
- Selecting low-fat dairy products, such as milk and yogurt
- Choosing whole grains over refined grains e.g. white bread

Resources

Recipes & Healthy Eating

Dietitians of Canada
www.cookspiration.com

Heart & Stroke Foundation
www.heartandstroke.com

Canadian Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.ca/diabetes-and-you/recipes

EatRight Ontario
www.eatrightontario.ca

HealthLink BC
www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating

Preventing Dementia

Alzheimer Society of Canada
www.alzheimer.ca/en/Living-widementia/BrainBooster



- **Choose colour.** Include colourful fruits and vegetables at each meal
- **Grill, steam and bake** foods instead of deep frying
- **Stock your kitchen** with a variety of dried or canned beans, frozen or canned fish, frozen vegetables and fruits
- **Add beans or legumes** to soups, stews and stir-fries
- **Snack smart.** Reach for nuts, fresh fruit, cut up vegetables and low fat yogurt
- **Keep hydrated.** Drink water or unsweetened beverages

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Team 6 Member Organizations:

Baycrest Health Sciences, Concordia University, Institut Universitaire de Geriatrie de Montreal, Centre de recherche du Centre hospitalier de l'université de Montreal, McGill University, Rotman Research Institute, Ryerson University, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto Rehab/UHN Cardiovascular Rehabilitation Program, Université de Montreal, Université de Sherbrooke, University Health Network, Toronto, University of British Columbia, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, Waterloo University

Supporting Evidence:

1. Smith PJ, Blumenthal, JA, Babyak MA, et al. Effects of the dietary approaches to stop hypertension diet, exercise, and caloric restriction on neurocognition in overweight adults with high blood pressure. *Hypertension*. 2010;55:1331-1338.
2. Valls-Pedret C, Sala-Vila A, Serra-Mir, et al. Mediterranean diet and age-related cognitive decline: a randomized trial. *JAMA Internal Medicine*. 2015;175(7):1094-1103.
3. Singh B, Parasai AK, Mielke MM, et al. Association of Mediterranean diet with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Alzheimers Dis*. 2014;39:271-282.



Which Foods Help the Brain?



BRAIN HEALTH
FOOD GUIDE

An Evidence-Based Approach to Healthy Eating for the Aging Brain



Foods to Include	Servings	Serving Size
Vegetables Total	5 or more times a day	1/2 cup except 1 cup for Raw Leafy Greens
Of this, be sure to include: Raw Leafy Greens (e.g. lettuce, spinach, mixed greens, kale, cabbage)	1 time a day	
Cruciferous Vegetables (e.g. broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, cabbage, bok choy)	3 times a week	
Fruit Total	4 or more times a day	1 medium fruit or 1/2 cup
Of this, be sure to include: Berries (fresh or frozen)	3 times a week	
Unsalted Nuts or All-natural Nut Butters Total (e.g. almond butter, peanut butter)	1 time a day	1/4 cup nuts or 2 tbsp nut butter
Of this, be sure to include: Walnuts	4 or more times a week	
Beans or Legumes (e.g. chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils, navy beans)	2 or more times a week	1/2 cup
Fish or Seafood Total (not battered or fried)	3 times a week	3-4 oz
Of this, be sure to include: Fatty fish (e.g. salmon, trout, sardines)	1 or more times a week	

- Choose whole grains (e.g. oats, brown rice, brown pasta, 100% whole wheat or whole grain breads, quinoa, bulgur, barley, whole grain pasta) instead of refined grains (e.g. white rice, white pasta, white bread)
- Use low-fat milk (skim or 1%), yogurt (0-2%), and cheese (about 22%)
- Use extra-virgin olive oil as your main culinary oil for cooking, salad dressings, and added to bread and foods



Foods to Limit	Servings	Serving Size
Any Meat and Poultry Total No more than 1 meal per day should include meat or poultry	1 or less per day	3-4 oz
Of this, be sure to limit: Red and processed meats (e.g. beef, pork, lamb, liver, sausages, hot dogs, jerky, cold cuts, pepperoni)	less than 1 per week	
Butter, cream, or high fat dairy spreads (e.g. sour cream, cream cheese)	less than 1 per week	1 tsp butter 1 tbsp cream
White breads (e.g. bread, rolls, bagels, pita, tortilla)	1 or less per week	1 slice bread 1/2 bagel
Pre-packaged foods and meals (e.g. canned soup, instant noodles, frozen appetizers, and entrees)		3 or less servings per week in total for all these foods Serving sizes according to the Nutrition Facts table on the food label
Potato chips, fries, pretzels, or other salty snacks or fried food		
Store-bought dairy desserts (e.g. ice cream, frozen yogurt, pudding, custard)		
Baked goods (especially store bought) (e.g. cookies, muffins, scones, croissants, donuts, cakes, pies)		
Candy and chocolate		
Pop, sweetened fruit juice or any other sugary drink		