

Adopt a Brain-Healthy Diet

According to the most current research, a brain-healthy diet is one that reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes, encourages good blood flow to the brain, and is low in fat and cholesterol. Like the heart, the brain needs the right balance of nutrients, including protein and sugar, to function well. A brain-healthy diet is most effective when combined with physical and mental activity and social interaction.

Manage your body weight for overall good health of brain and body. A long-term study of 1,500 adults found that those who were obese in middle age were twice as likely to develop dementia in later life. Those who also had high cholesterol and high blood pressure had six times the risk of dementia. Adopt an overall food lifestyle, rather than a short-term diet, and eat in moderation.

Reduce your intake of foods high in fat and cholesterol. Studies have shown that high intake of saturated fat and cholesterol clogs the arteries and is associated with higher risk for Alzheimer's disease. However, HDL (or "good") cholesterol may help protect brain cells. Use mono- and polyunsaturated fats, such as olive oil, for example. Try baking or grilling food instead of frying.

Increase your intake of protective foods. Current research suggests that certain foods may reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, and appear to protect brain cells.

- In general, dark-skinned fruits and vegetables have the highest levels of naturally occurring antioxidant levels. Such vegetables include: kale, spinach, brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, broccoli, beets, red bell pepper, onion, corn and eggplant. Fruits with high antioxidant levels include prunes, raisins, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, plums, oranges, red grapes and cherries.
- Cold water fish contain beneficial omega-3 fatty acids: halibut, mackerel, salmon, trout and tuna.
- Some nuts can be a useful part of your diet; almonds, pecans and walnuts are a good source of vitamin E, an antioxidant.

Not enough information is available to indicate what quantities of these foods might be most beneficial for brain health. For example, it is not clear how much fruit would have to be consumed to have a detectable benefit. However, a study of elderly women showed that those who ate the most green, leafy and cruciferous vegetables in the group were one to two years younger in mental function than women who ate few of these vegetables.

Vitamins may be helpful. There is some indication that vitamins, such as vitamin E, or vitamins E and C together, vitamin B12 and folate may be important in lowering your risk of developing Alzheimer's. A brain-healthy diet will help increase your intake of these vitamins and the trace elements necessary for the body to use them effectively.