



Feed the brain by eating smart

What sorts of foods should I eat to keep my mental activity at its peak function?

When I was growing up, whenever we had fish for dinner, my dad called it “brain food.” Remarkably, there is some truth to that (read on for details). But in more recent years, researchers have turned their attention to the positive effects of fruit, vegetables and whole grains, and how they might help with cognitive function.

For example, a study published in 2006 in the journal *Neurology*, looked at the diets and mental function of participants over time, from 1993-2002. The 3,700 participants, who were 65 or older, were given mental-skill tests. They were also asked to report on the types of foods they ate, including specific lists of 28 types of vegetables and 14 types of fruit. Participants were tested again after three and six years.

The Rush University researchers determined that those who showed the least mental decline in the follow-up tests after three and six years tended to eat the most vegetables. In fact, mental decline was 40 percent slower for people who reported eating three to four servings of vegetables every day (not including potatoes) compared with those who ate less than one serving a day.

Surprisingly, the researchers didn't see the same pattern with fruit consumption -- they could discern no link between fruit and mental acuity at all.

However, French researchers reported in 2007 in the *American Journal*

of Epidemiology that, over a 10-year period, older adults who consumed the most flavonoids (found mainly in fruits and vegetables), tended to have higher cognitive functioning. And yet another study, this one in 2006 in the *American Journal of Medicine*, linked higher consumption of fruit and vegetable juice with delaying the onset of Alzheimer's disease; researchers believed the polyphenols in the juices played a protective role, although there's evidence that antioxidants such as vitamins A, C and E as well as the mineral selenium also may play a role in protecting against dementia and enhancing mental ability.

Niacin and other B vitamins, found in whole grains and some other foods, are also known to contribute to the proteins that are needed for good memory.

In addition, scientists believe that omega-3 fatty acids, found in fatty types of fish, such as salmon, and in nuts and seeds, not only help supply oxygen to the brain, but work to protect the membranes of brain cells, thus preventing damage.

And finally, drinking plenty of water and other fluids can prevent dehydration, which can affect clarity of the mind. A good guideline to keep hydrated is to drink enough fluids to need to urinate every two to four hours.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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