

Boost Your Brain Power

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Who hasn't misplaced their keys or forgotten what they were going to say? These temporary memory glitches are normal. Stress and fatigue can certainly play a role. But so can healthy eating.

Unlike our muscles, the brain cannot store glucose to produce energy. The brain constantly draws on glucose in the fluid surrounding our brain cells. Regularly eaten healthy meals with carbohydrates (found in grains, fruits, vegetables, beans) are the best fuel source. These foods also provide other nutrients essential for brain function—B vitamins, vitamins C and E, iron and zinc.

When it comes to maintaining a sharp mental focus, breakfast is particularly important. After 8 to 12 hours without food, the brain needs to be refueled. Studies have repeatedly shown that people who skip breakfast often feel more tired, irritable and restless in the morning. However, breakfast eaters have better attitudes toward work, are more productive and have better ability to do tasks requiring memory.

A "Mediterranean" diet may also improve cognitive function. Researchers have found that this style of healthy eating, which emphasizes fruits, vegetables and olive oil and little red meat, may be associated with a reduced risk for Alzheimer's disease.

There is some evidence that specific healthy foods may benefit brain function. Strawberries, blueberries, dried plums and fatty fish such as salmon are all foods that may help short-term memory. One study found that healthy eating adults who consume three servings of vegetables a day (especially green, leafy vegetables) maintain mental ability 40% longer than those who eat less than

one serving. Turmeric, a component of curry, is also being studied as a potent compound that may help prevent Alzheimer's disease. Of particular interest to researchers is that in India, where curry is a commonly consumed spice, Alzheimer's disease is not common.

It is important to keep in mind that cardiovascular risk factors (high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity) are also associated with cognitive decline. People who have diabetes are at greater risk for Alzheimer's disease. Working to reduce your risk of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes through healthy eating may help you maintain cognitive function.

Stay sharp mentally with these lifestyle changes:

- Eat a well-balanced diet of healthy meals with an emphasis on fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Eat breakfast daily.
- Get enough rest.
- Keep your blood pressure in check.
- Exercise your body regularly.
- Give your brain a workout too. Do puzzles and read, solve math problems without a calculator.

References:

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